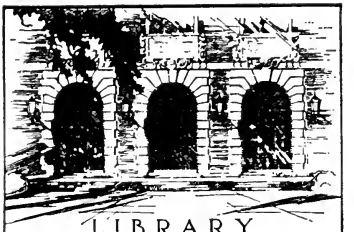
THE TWO LANCROFTS



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THE TWO LANCROFTS

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BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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THE TWO LANCROFTS.

CHAPTER I.

"How old is your son?"

"Willie, oh, Willie? Let me see. He is—eighteen. Yes; he will be nineteen on the 24th of next November—next November." She gave a deep sigh. "Yes—nineteen. He goes to Oxford next October." Mrs. Lancroft said this last sentence more coherently than the previous ones, looking up rather keenly at her interlocutor as she did so.

"Ah," was all that Mr. Bousfield replied. He felt a good deal of inward irritation—beyond even that which is incident to having remained in a house of mourning for twenty-four hours. But he congratulated himself on having

mastered the feeling, and merely said, "Ah!"

"Would you like me to take you to your room, Laura?" said her brother-in-law. "I think now that Bousfield and I can discuss the questions of business together."

"Perfectly," said the co-executor. "And as I fear I must catch the five o'clock train, I had better say good-bye." He spoke in the low tone which is appropriate to the house of mourning. "Good-*bye*, my dear friend." He pressed her hand gently as he said this.

"Good-bye," Mrs. Lancroft sighed. She gave him another of those glances which seemed to have a certain expectancy in them. Then she went out slowly on the arm of her brother-in-law, the Rev. Godfred Lancroft.

Mr. Bousfield's face kept the same expression of decorous sympathy after Mrs. Lancroft had left the room. He thought, "I wonder if I ought to have repeated what I said in my letter about my having

lost one of my oldest and best friends. She seemed to expect me to say something. But it's so much easier to say those things in a letter. Poor Lancroft! I'm very sorry for him, I must say; but he certainly has been playing the fool in a terrible way with that farm of his." Then the executor remembered what Mrs. Lancroft had said about the son going to college in October, and his irritation returned. "In a terrible way," he repeated to himself.

Mr. Godfred Lancroft came back.

"She is in her room; I've left her with my wife and her daughter Carry," he said, speaking always in the hushed tones which ceremony required. "Dear me! it looks as if there was a sea fog coming up."

Mr. Bousfield too looked out of the window—there were three deep narrow windows to the drawing-room of Speilby Abbey. Opposite him a broad grass walk, flanked by low weeping elms and standard roses, led straight to a wall

built partly of brick and partly of stone, at the end of the garden. The elms, the roses, the bank of rhododendrons which shut off a walk along the end of the garden, lay all quite still in the June sunlight, into which a light mist was now beginning to creep. And into Mr. Bousfield's practical mind there entered for a moment a vague recollection of some childhood legend, some story of a custom of "telling the bees" when the master of the house died. Through a door which was just visible in the wall opposite you passed on to a tract of no-man's land made up of bare sandhills; and on the other side of the sandhills came the sea beach. Though the sea itself could not be seen from any of the windows of the Abbey, even on the stillest day such as this was, its monotonous low voice could be heard.

Presently over the rhododendrons to the right Mr. Bousfield caught sight of a head moving, a head in a striped cricket-cap, whose owner appeared to be

walking with slow and regular steps while he smoked.

. . . . .

There were, in fact, two people at that corner of the garden, Willie Lancroft, the only surviving son of the house, and his cousin Hope, who was two years and more his senior. Nobody but Hope Lancroft would have put himself in Willie's way in the circumstances; for the two cousins really knew each other but slightly, and Hope had no distinct idea of playing the part of a consoler. If he had been asked why he was there he would probably have replied that he came there first; and he might have added that he did not know that a man was supposed to say nothing to anybody because he had been to his father's funeral. As it was, ten minutes had passed without either of them speaking, the one walking up and down, the other seated on a bench, when Hope, who with his small wonderfully bright eyes had watched his cousin as he paced to and fro, spoke suddenly.

"I suppose," he said, "in a position like that, one hardly knows what one feels."

Willie started; not, however, because of the indelicacy of the observation, but because of its truth. Then he flushed.

"If I were a woman," Hope went on, "I should find a lot of things to say. They go in much more for ready-made things than we do, in dress and everything else." Hope was too young to make epigrams; but he had leanings in that direction.

Willie stopped in his walk, knocked out the ashes of his pipe, took a long vague look at his cousin, and replied not to the last observation but to the first one.

"Yes," he said, and he gave a half sigh; "you hardly know what you feel like—what anything is—"

While Hope, following the bent of his own thoughts, continued, "Well, the great thing that can be said for us is that we are not hypocritical. At least—"

He did not finish the sentence ; a sudden thought made him smile to himself.

And this time Willie caught the thought in its flight, though he answered by an apparently irrelevant remark.

"How long are you going to stay at Battersby ?"

"Oh, as long as I can this time. I've got," Hope went on, getting up from his seat and putting both hands in his trousers pockets, "a tremendous scheme on hand."

"How do you mean ? What sort of a scheme ?"

"It'll make them all sit up. I've told nobody about it yet." Hope was striding backwards and forwards across the grass pathway rather excitedly as he spoke. "You'll hear of it," he concluded, "in a month or two."

Willie looked at him for a minute as if he expected he was going to say more. Then he put back his pipe into his mouth. He seemed to have forgotten his cousin, and, walking like an absent-minded per-

son, he went in the direction of the drawing-room windows.

"He's a lucky beggar," Hope said to himself, looking after him. For he, like Willie himself, if the latter allowed his thoughts to dwell upon the subject, had a vague notion that Willie had now come into an independent position and was master of his own future. Of course Hope did not fancy, as he used to when a boy, that Speilby Abbey had belonged to his Uncle Robert. But he vaguely thought that the farm would manage itself, and that the house and all its appurtenances would come to Willie as the eldest son. There were some things about which Hope was very ignorant in those days; and it was in ignorance that he said, "He's a lucky beggar," as he watched Willie's form retreating across the lawn.

. . . . .

The sight of Willie Lancroft in the distance had brought the two executors back to business.

"Mrs. Lancroft appears to hold very much to sending her son to college," Mr. Bousfield said. "But of course that's quite impossible."

"I suppose it is—yes, I suppose it is," said the Rev. Godfred. His accent, like his sister-in-law's, had something of a note of interrogation in it. But it also implied in advance, "Whatever you decide, I am prepared to agree to."

"Oh, absolutely. There can be no question of that—none whatever." The co-executor spoke more decidedly still. For even the other's mild half-interrogation irritated him. "Why, when a man dies as good as a bankrupt!" he went on to himself, fuming inwardly. "I shall never get back my three hundred pounds, I know that; and don't expect to, of course. Poor Lancroft's welcome enough to that."

Both remained silent for a minute.

"My poor sister-in-law will be—," Mr. Godfred Lancroft began again. "Well, of course there's no reason to speak of

that matter immediately." He said this rather hurriedly, for Willie Lancroft appeared at that moment at the drawing-room window. "Come in, Willie, come in," he said, cheerfully, forgetting himself for a moment; and then, in a sombre voice, "Come *in*, my boy."

"Well, I must be seeing about my train," said Mr. Bousfield. "Well, my boy," he went on to Willie, imitating as nearly as possible the tone in which the uncle had last spoken, "I suppose you'll be going back to school. Your poor mother tells me you're getting on very well there. I'm glad to hear it; I'm very glad to hear it. You must work hard, you know. Your mother and sisters may—will—er—lean upon you a good deal, I daresay. Now if you would just go round and see if the trap could be got ready for me."

Willie Lancroft was in height above the average, broad-shouldered and exceptionally strongly built. He had heavy superciliary ridges which gave him, seen

from a little distance, rather a sullen look. This was counteracted by the mild expression of his large blue eyes, as well as by a certain awkwardness and hesitancy of manner which often accompanies exceptional physical strength. He gave many people who saw him for the first time the impression that he was rather dull. There was, however, among other things, his school record to negative any such theory. He was famous at Rugby for his verse-making in Greek, Latin, and English, and had this last term almost beaten the record in the number of times that he had been sent up for good. When a fellow is in the sixth, and in *the* fifteen at football, and is popularly supposed to be able to lick any other chap in the school—if sixth-form boys ever had to display their prowess in this respect —diffidence can hardly be a dominant note in his character. Now, however, in the presence of these two executors, who had been settling all the family affairs, and had not once called him into council,

Willie felt himself shrinking in size by cubic inches every minute. He stood there large and heavy, awkward and blushing, inwardly resenting being called "my boy" by almost a stranger, but with not even the shadow of an idea how to assert himself.

"You'd like a cup of tea before you go?" said Uncle Godfred. "Willie, tell them to bring in tea."

"What a fool *I* was not to offer the old bloke tea," thought Willie Lancroft, as he went to the door.

"No, no tea. Nothing whatever, thank you. No, you needn't," Mr. Bousfield called out to Willie who was just going out; "only speak about the trap, thank you."

"Have we any more business matters to discuss?" said the clergyman. The word "more" might have been omitted.

"No, I don't think there is any use discussing business matters at present. Peard will prepare the accounts and bring them up to London. If you could

meet me there, that would be the best way, and we could go into them together."

"Yes, yes; when you like. I quite trust your judgment, you know," said Uncle Godfred.

CHAPTER II.

A MONTH after this conversation Mrs. Lancroft was sitting at breakfast in the library at the Abbey. She had only of late begun again to do this, deeming that it showed more respect for her husband's memory to breakfast in bed than in the library. During this past month her mind had been in a tumult. It would have taken a much cleverer person than she was to distinguish between all its component feelings at this or at any moment, and say what was poignant grief, what was discomfort only, an undreamt-of terror of loneliness and responsibility; how much was preoccupation with what her new situation demanded of her, and fear of being in any way found wanting therein. This one thing alone is certain, that Mrs. Lancroft had

acquired the habit of crying easily, and even of sometimes wiping her eyes and blowing her nose in anticipation of tears which in fact—though she did not notice it—never came.

Carry and Charlie, the two girls, were in the room when Mrs. Lancroft came in. They went up and kissed their mother; the good-natured, friendly Carry in her usual hearty way, which had at bottom a touch of indifference in it; Charlie with all her nerves vividly on the watch for that funereal kiss in return, and the deep sigh following it which had become habitual with Mrs. Lancroft now.

"Have you rung for prayers, Carry dear?"

"Yes, mother. Shall I read them, or will you?"

"I think you had better—if you don't mind," and Mrs. Lancroft gave another deep sigh. This formula, too, had been repeated every morning since Mrs. Lancroft came down, and every evening; to Carry there appeared nothing amiss in it.

After prayers Mrs. Lancroft sat down at the breakfast-table and filled the tea-pot; then Jane—Banby the man-servant had gone—brought in the letters, and each became absorbed in her own.

"Oh, Charlie! Millicent Forbes has got leave to go to New—Newn—"

"To college? Oh, I'm so glad."

They stopped suddenly, for Mrs. Lancroft was seen to be crying.

"Oh, poor, poor Willie," she said, in a voice stifled by her pocket-handkerchief. "How disappointed his father would have been if he could have known this," and she broke down so that she could say no more.

"Willie! What has Willie done, mother?" cried Charlie.

"What is it, mother, dear?" and Carry, who had not yet sat down, went to Mrs. Lancroft's side. She made a motion as if to put her hand on her mother's shoulder, but thought better of it, and only remained standing by her side.

"Read it," said Mrs. Lancroft, still

sobbing. "Your father had settled everything, and Willie was so looking forward to October. Oh! it is too *terrible!*"

Charlie had left her place and come up to Carry's side; and the two sisters held the letter with trembling hands and read it together. It intimated, in as kind a way as was consistent with business-like brevity, that no doubt Mr. Godfred Lancroft had explained to his sister-in-law how impossible, under the altered family circumstances, it would be for her son to go to college as had been intended. That, as his education was now practically complete, it became the duty of his trustees to consider whether he could not be placed in a position to earn something —however little at first—for himself, in order to lessen the burden which fell upon the estate; and that the writer, Mr. Bousfield, believed that his influence would be able to secure the young man—though the competition for places of this description was very keen—a clerkship

in the Union London and Provincial Bank, where, if he showed capacity and industry, he might soon rise to a position of trust and comfort.

"Oh, mother, why should Willie be obliged to give up going to college?" said Charlie, her breath coming quickly.

"You see what he says, darling. But I don't understand how this can be. Your—dear—father, I know, had set aside a sum sufficient to pay for the whole of Willie's future education. He often used to speak of the sum—" and she began to use her pocket-handkerchief again. "I—I—think it—it was a thousand pounds, or two thousand."

"A thousand pounds! Oh, mother."

"Well, it may have been less. I daresay I have forgotten. I am so stupid now, I cannot recollect anything."

"Dear mammy," said Carry, soothingly, and with a caressing movement which was not quite spontaneous.

"Then why has Mr. Bousfield taken the money away?" said Charlie, growing

hot. She had so often read of fraudulent executors in the old-fashioned novels which formed the chief literature of which Speilby Abbey boasted.

"I don't know, my darling. How can I know? Your father trusted Mr. Bousfield implicitly. Give me a very little kedgeree, will you, dear Carry."

"Does Uncle Godfred know, do you think?" said Carry, after half a minute's pause. "Oh, mother, write to him."

"Yes, *mother*, write to him," said Charlie, excitedly. Her fancy had already carried her about as far as the trial and conviction of Mr. Bousfield.

"Would not Mr. Peard know?" said Carry.

"No. We must ask Uncle Godfred," Charlie continued, still full of excitement. "I am sure he will look after Willie's money."

"Your uncle has not been a great help to me, I must say," said Mrs. Lancroft, plaintively. "He has been quite as bad as Mr. Bousfield about making me sell

the brougham and Norfolk, and in trying to find another tenant for this house—I have no doubt they both acted for the best."

"But if papa left this money for Willie to go to college with, it must be somewhere," insisted Charlie.

"Well, you cannot be sure. I suppose if the trustees or executors thought right to take it, they had a perfect right to do so, as your father trusted them."

"*Take* it, mother. Do you mean take it for themselves?"

"I don't know, dear. Of course they would not do anything they had not a legal right to do."

"Oh, I am sure Uncle Godfred would never do that," said Carry.

. . . .

The scheme of sending for Uncle Godfred was rendered unnecessary by the appearance of that executor the same day at luncheon. Battersby, where the Godfred Lancrofts lived, was only sixteen miles—one hour's journey on the slow

branch line—from Speilby, and so a pretty frequent intercourse between the two families was possible; though, as a matter of fact, it was only kept up between two members of the respective houses—Carry and Edith Lancroft, who were nearly of an age. The present Mrs. Godfred Lancroft had not been anxious that too close an intimacy should exist between her household and that of her brother-in-law, who, "though," in the language of the set to which she belonged, "he was, of course, quite a gentleman," was only a farmer. There had been a time when Speilby Abbey, with its wide, roomy house and old-fashioned garden, its boat-house on the shore, its rookery and its great meadows, had been a magnificent place in the eyes of the Battersbys, as their cousins called them—still more so in the days when the Battersbys were not yet Battersbys, but lived at All-Syston. But these were the days before the children were of an age to understand the difference between a

tenant in tail and a tenant on lease. During the last month that he had been charged with the duties of an executor, Uncle Godfred had rather frequently come over from Battersby to Speilby for luncheon, as he did to-day.

When the clergyman came into the morning-room the sentiments of all the three inhabitants of it underwent an immediate change. It was of the nature of the Rev. Godfred Lancroft to produce such effects by his mere presence. The three women had been feeling almost hostile to him a moment before; not on account of any supposed wrongful act of his own, but from the notion that he ought to have taken their part against Mr. Bousfield, whereas he seemed rather to take Mr. Bousfield's side against his own family. But when Mrs. Lancroft looked at her brother's handsome bald forehead and mild blue eyes all the feeling died away.

"How are you, dear Laura?" and he pressed her hand. This form of address

to his sister-in-law had become almost stereotyped with him, yet was there something specially comforting and kind in it. And the same thought came into the minds of all the three women, "After all, he is the only man to uphold us." Only Charlie put it slightly differently to herself, "the only man except Willie, and he cannot do much yet."

Mrs. Lancroft began as soon as possible upon the letter.

"I have had a most terrible letter from Mr. Bousfield," she said. "I don't know whether it is true what he says. But if Robert had been alive it would have broken his heart, I believe. He had planned for years to send his son to college. And my boy has done *so* well at Rugby. The last term's report was so excellent, except for that football accident. It came the very day my poor Robbie was taken ill. He was—so—pleased—I —remember." Mrs. Lancroft was wiping her eyes with her handkerchief as she said this.

"Yes, my dear Laura, I wish—I wish very much it could be so," said her brother-in-law, in his melodious voice.

"But why *can't* it, Uncle Godfred?" broke in Charlie, "when papa put by the money on purpose."

"Hush, Charlie, don't interrupt," said her mother.

"My dear, you can't expect to understand these things," said Mr. Lancroft, with a touch of asperity in his voice. "Of course, if poor Robbie had lived," he went on to his sister-in-law, "there would have been no difficulty about sending his son to Corpus, as he intended. That is to say, most probably there would have been none. But things had not been going on well, as I explained to you. It was impossible for him to foresee, it is impossible for any of us, how things will turn out in these days. We clergymen suffer in just the same way from the fall of prices. My own income is most seriously diminished. I wish very much I saw some way of carrying out

Robert's wishes with regard to his boy," he went on, returning to the matter in hand. "Bousfield's written to me on the subject."

"Oh! What does he say to you? In his letter to me he wants us actually to take Willie away from school at once and send him into a bank. You *couldn't* approve of such a plan. Fancy making a mere bank clerk of the boy at his age."

"Ah, well—well, let me see Bousfield's letter."

Uncle Godfred said this simply to gain time, for he felt sure that the contents of this letter were practically the same as those of the one written to himself. He settled his gold eye-glasses on his nose and read with deliberation, conscious all the time as he read that three other pair of eyes were fixed upon his face in anxiety and hope. He came presently to the passage,—

"Mr. Lancroft will no doubt have already pointed out to you how impossible it is—"

"Why should he expect you to explain to me how impossible it is for my husband's wishes to be carried out?" said Mrs. Lancroft.

By watching her brother-in-law's eyes she could tell what paragraph he was reading at any moment.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said the clergyman, laying the letter down upon his knee and taking off his eye-glasses. "I haven't, I don't profess to have, the same knowledge of business that Mr. Bousfield possesses. But I am bound to say I rely, we must rely, upon his judgment in matters of this sort."

"Oh, Uncle Godfred!" exclaimed Charlie, in dismay.

She began to see her worst fears realized—the fraudulent executor, the supine co-executor—and she could not restrain this exclamation.

"Well, Charlie, *really*," said the uncle, testily, "I think I may be allowed to understand these matters better than you."

"How silly you are, Charlie," said the elder sister. "But, Uncle Godfred, what has Mr. Bousfield done with the money then?"

"What money do you mean, Carry?" he asked.

"The money my dear husband left for Willie's expenses at Oxford," said Mrs. Lancroft. "I thought it was the duty of the executors to carry out the wishes of —of the dead at any cost."

"To themselves" she would have liked to add, but refrained. She wiped her eyes again as she spoke.

"Of course, of course," her brother-in-law answered, solemnly. "I should rather say to do their very *utmost* to carry them out. And that is what Bousfield and I are endeavouring to do, rest assured of that. If it had been possible consistently with making a home for you and the girls, I am sure that Bousfield would have been as anxious as I am to carry out my poor brother's wishes in this particular."

"No, Godfred, he would not," said

Mrs. Lancroft. "Do you know I saw it in his face the first day he was here after"—and she dropped her voice—"after he became executor. I saw in his face that he did not wish Willie to go to Oxford."

"Oh, my dear Laura, I think you're mistaken on that point."

"No, I am not, Godfred, I assure you. If I could be quite sure," she went on, half to herself, "that he had not done something with that money."

"My dear Laura! What, *stolen* it, do you mean?"

"Oh, no, I don't mean stolen it for himself; but kept it back in some way."

"Come, *come*, Laura. Don't you see that the first thing we executors have to do is to secure a provision, an adequate provision for you and the girls, who could not possibly provide for yourselves. The men—the males of a family must necessarily come second to such an object as this. It does seem an opening for Willie, I must say. College life leads a

young man into a great deal of temptation. I rejected the idea in the case of my son."

But here Uncle Godfred paused. He knew that, whether or no he had been guided solely with a view to his son's moral welfare when he sent him into an architect's office, the reports which he received of Hope Lancroft's present career were not of a kind to afford him any special reason to congratulate himself on his decision.

"But all the masters thought so highly of Willie, even after that disappointment with the football accident. If it hadn't been for our trouble he would certainly have got the exhibition, and that would have saved twenty pounds a year."

"Yes, yes. It is very sad, very sad indeed. But still, twenty pounds a year, what is that? Nothing, comparatively speaking, to the expenses of a young man at the University."

The brother and sister-in-law were alone at this point of the conversation,

for a minute before Charlie pulled Carry by the sleeve, and whispered to her, and they went out of the room together.

"Did you hear what Uncle Godfred said about being obliged to provide for us?" Charlie began, directly they were on the other side of the door.

"Yes."

"Oh, Carry, what *are* we to do? I am sure I could provide for myself, if I only knew how to begin. It will break Willie's heart not to go to Oxford—I know it will. You remember the letter he wrote when he went up to pass his matriculation, and now—"

Carry was musing.

"*I* could be a governess," she said; "but you must stay at home with mother. That's what we must do. Let's speak to Uncle Godfred at once."

"I believe I could be a governess or something," said Charlie, but in an altered voice, for her enthusiasm died down as she realized her incapacity to help.

She was only seventeen: Carry was twenty-one. The greater force of Charlie's character always tended to make the difference of age between the sisters disappear at home. But that fact did not make Charlie eligible for a situation of responsibility.

"What will mother say?" she asked, rather in alarm, for Carry was much the favourite daughter.

Carry made no answer, but returned to the room with Charlie behind her.

"Uncle Godfred!" she said, directly she got inside, turning very red as she spoke.

"Yes, my dear."

"If you couldn't provide for us I could be a governess or something; I am going to teach Charlie now, and then Willie could go to college."

"My dear—a governess!" said Mrs. Lancroft.

"Yes, mother," said Charlie, unable to hold her tongue, and quite willing to sacrifice her sister for her brother, "Milli-

cent Forbes wants to be a governess in a school."

"That's not the question," said her uncle, this time with something like severity. "It's for your mother to decide such a matter, not you," he went on more mildly, turning to the elder sister. "Besides, I don't think it is practicable—nor reasonable," he added. "Come, you must leave these matters to be decided by those who understand them."

And thus the revolt of the younger members of the family was snuffed out.

Afterwards, when alone with their mother, they tried to get her to look at the notion in a practical light, but it was of no use.

"If Mr. Bousfield is set against Willie going to Oxford, and your uncle can give us no help, I don't see what we can do to help it," Mrs. Lancroft said.

In this wise was the career of Willie Lancroft decided. The way the matter was put to him left him no room for remonstrance. The protest which Willie's

form-master sent to him, Mr. Godfred Lancroft did not see his way to do anything with, except send on to his brother executor; and as Mr. Bousfield was not a public-school man it made no impression upon him. Then, unfortunately, it was Mr. Evans, who took the lower bench, who was chiefly interested in Willie Lancroft—Mr. Evans and another young master, Mr. Sloane-Jarvis; and Dr. Highfield, the head-master of Rugby, was not on very good terms with either of these reforming spirits, and therefore he interested himself less in the case than, if left to himself, he would have done. And —and finally there was no help; and the people who had most to do in determining Willie Lancroft's future career thought they had acted with a great deal of wisdom.

Willie's sisters could only comfort themselves with the thought that he was the victim of a great wrong on the part of one at least of their father's executors. Of Willie himself I do not know that he found any source of consolation at all.

CHAPTER III.

"MR. EBSTHWAITE will explain to you your duties, Mr. Lancroft. Good morning."

"Good morning, sir;" and Willie took the hand of the City manager, an important-looking personage with bushy grey whiskers, while Mr. Ebsthwaite stood on one side. He too was grey-haired. He had a pointed beard, arched eyebrows, and a mild official sort of face. "Good morning Mr. Knowles," he said to his chief, as he left with the new clerk.

Willie felt a singing in his ears. He knew that his ears were red, and that he looked sheepish and uncomfortable. That breakfast with Mr. Bousfield, how he had hated it; and coming on here and being introduced by the pompous

director to the important manager. He recalled lugubriously his last parting with Bousfield at Speilby. He had felt rather snubbed then; but compared with what he felt now, he had been a prince.

A dozen steps down a corkscrew staircase, and as many more along a stone passage, brought them from the manager's room to the door leading into the large room of the Bank.

"We shall put you on to Clearing House duty at once," said Mr. Ebsthwaite, in an encouraging tone of voice. "But for the first week you will have to go down with one of the clerks. You'll soon get used to it."

"Yes, sir."

Ought he to say "Sir" or not? It had been all right at school, but somehow it seemed degrading here. Willie felt a dread of being too deferential, and a still greater dread of calling down upon himself the insult either of reproof or ridicule. He had at this time of his life no small share of that—you may call it as you

please, either moral cowardice or only the negation of impudence—which often accompanies great strength and the inexperience of physical fear.

As they neared it, the glass door into the Bank swang open, and a subdued roar like the roar of the sea came from behind it, and subsided again as the door closed. A tall, slim young man, theoretically close-shaven but with a stubble about twenty-four hours old on his cheek and chin, met them in the passage. Willie had only time to notice further his prominent eyes and his white necktie spotted with red. He nodded familiarly to Mr. Ebsthwaite and seemed to pass them in a second. But Mr. Ebsthwaite turned round and called after him.

"Is Mr. Tipping on the Clearing House run to-day?"

"No; holiday," the clerk answered over his shoulder, and was about to pass through another door.

"And ah, where is Mr. Gill?" the other called out again louder.

"Walks:" this time the clerk definitely disappeared.

"Of course," said Mr. Ebsthwaite, aloud to himself, "I changed him myself. However, it's of no consequence," and he passed through the glass door into the large room, holding the door open for Willie to follow. "If you'll follow me I'll—" "Ah, Mr. Wellick," he said to another clerk, whom he met just inside the door, "you didn't stay to finish the N.P. balance last night."

"No, I didn't," said Mr. Wellick. What Willie noticed about him was that he had close-cropped hair, which came low down on his forehead, and gave him somewhat the look of a convict. "I'll get it all right to-night," he added, encouragingly.

Willie, for his part, stood aside dazzled and dazed, forgetting where he was. The room was lighted chiefly from the farther end, which seemed to consist almost entirely of a ground-glass window which was carried up into a sky-light

in the roof. The window was strongly barred with iron. There was another sky-light running at right angles to the end one; but it was not visible from where Willie Lancroft stood. Between himself and the end window, Willie could see, without quite taking in the nature of what he saw, rows and rows of desks —interminable rows they seemed—with brass railings at the tops, which stood black against the end window, and with electric lamps at their sides. A few of the lamps nearest him were lighted. Black figures were continually rising from behind the desks and moving across the room. On the right hand side of him, but as it seemed afar off, stretched the long counter. It was, Willie saw, divided into a number of compartments, with ground-glass screens and brass-work. Beyond it the hatted members of the outside public were discernible. Over them and over the counter was shed a light from the invisible sky-light above. A painter, with his senses keenly about

him, might have made something of the dingy room with its contrasts of light and its "values." To Willie Lancroft at that moment it all seemed like a procession of shadows. There was a constant, but not loud, noise all round him. Now a breeze of conversation, now the slamming of a desk, or the echo of a book dropped: with these mingled the lesser noises of the clink of the scales on the counter, the scratching of pens near by, people walking about with creaking boots.

Mr. Ebsthwaite was still engaged in talk with a tall, thin clerk; and Willie stood uneasily by one of the desks, not liking to seem dependent on each one of Mr. Ebsthwaite's movements, and yet with no idea where he ought to place himself or what to do. A pale-faced, pale-haired clerk was sitting at this desk, and another with a large collar and a black moustache was standing beside him.

"Two—seven—six; nineteen—thir-

teen — five ; seven — ought — ought." ("Nought—nought," corrected the pale-faced clerk. "Shut up," replied the other.) "Twenty-four — seventeen—nine." They kept up a constant, rapid murmur of figures. At last—

"I differ with you," said the black-haired clerk.

"You differ *from* me," answered the other.

"With."

"From."

"Swine ! I shall say which I choose. Come over the shillings again. Seventy —eighteen—five ; thirteen—nine—six ; seven—"

"Ah, there it is ! " said the seated clerk, "you've got sixteen down instead of six."

"You said sixteen."

"I didn't, you pig ; I said six. You're half asleep. Where have you been yesterday? Up the river, I suppose."

"Well, yes, I was up the river. I don't see any harm in that, do you ? " He gave a wink as he asked the question.

Here a third clerk, short, with a pasty face and thick red lips, carrying a ledger, stopped beside the two for a moment.

"Yes, I expect that's about the style of it;" and the voices became inaudible for a moment.

"Oh, you narty man!" said the newcomer, trying to give a certain music-hall twang to his words, "I am shocked at yew."

"She's a jolly little piece, I can tell you."

"All right, Charlie," the thick-lipped clerk called out. "You shall tyke me raund next Sunday and introdooce me."

"Oh, I don't mind introducing you, you're such an ugly chap."

"Well, if she laïkes your staïle, I don't suppose she's very pertikler."

Then he went on his way. The two clerks fell to their accounts again; and for a minute or two Willie heard nothing but their murmur of "fourteen—thirteen — ought; fifty-five — seven — eleven; forty-three—eighteen—ten."

"Ah! Mr. Lancroft," said Mr. Ebsthwaite, turning round to him, "will you take a seat for the present? Is there another seat there, Mr. Hanbury? Let me introduce you. This is Mr. Lancroft, Mr. Pine; Mr. Lancroft, Mr. Hanbury." Mr. Hanbury was the pale-haired clerk, Mr. Pine the clerk with the black moustache.

Mr. Ebsthwaite turned away. The two clerks had shaken hands with Willie with much formality. He was rather surprised at the excessive politeness that they displayed, unconsciously comparing it with his recollections of his first introduction at Rugby.

"Has Mr. Ebsthwaite settled where you are to sit?" said Mr. Pine, as if for the sake of saying something. "I shouldn't wonder if he put you on the Clearing House run. He'll probably send you down with some one else to start with."

"When will that be?" said Willie.

"Oh, not till this afternoon, I expect," and he looked at his companion.

"Most likely this afternoon," the other assented, nodding, and then he turned back to his accounts.

Willie sat still, scraps of conversation floating to him.

"Oh, Blue Money's a safety for the Kempton Nursery, I tell you."

"'Ow do you know that?"

"Well, I do know it, that's all. Why you see how the Earl of Bexley's backing him. I know for certain he's pretty well laid 'is shirt on him."

This came from two clerks who were passing down the room. From behind the next desk a more domestic conversation was going on.

"I generally like a bit of meat at my tea. Sometimes it'll only be a bit of cold 'am. But I'm very fond of a piece of cold bacon, too. Most people don't care for cold bacon, but I'm very partial to it myself."

"Well, I never take meat at night. I've heard that tea turns meat into leather. Did you ever hear that?

Generally, I don't take anything more than an egg or a little bit of fish, perhaps; but last night I thought I'd fâncy a little shell fish. So I arsked my wife to get me a crab. It's not once in a blue moon, scarcely, I take anything of that sort; but I seemed to fâncy it somehow last night, and I'm sure it's done me no 'arm."

"No; I've no doubt it 'asn't. I believe there's a good deal in taking what you've a fâncy to."

"I'm sure there is. Well, I shall go to the old place for lunch."

"See you there; so long." And a heavy boot creaked down the room.

Mr. Ebsthwaite came up again with a ledger under his arm. "I suppose you understand the system of bank entries, Mr. Lancroft. If you will just take this ledger and enter these drafts to debit of Robarts, this to Glyns, and this one to Hoares; you'll find them at folios eighty-seven, forty-three, and fifty-one, I think. Mr. Hanbury will explain

to you any difficulties that you may have."

Willie could not help his hands trembling. In truth, an awful moment had struck in his life, as it has struck in the lives of most of us, signalling his entry into the dark House of Toil. A moment ago he had said to himself instinctively, as he heard Mr. Pine and Mr. Hanbury going over their accounts, "What has all this to do with me?" Now with a sudden throb of something like terror he realized how much in truth he had to do with it all. In that dark House of Toil (as even then he half discerned), there is no voice nor ear for human sufferings, for human aspirations, for loves, hates, prayers, promises, oaths of friendship or of revenge. Would a time ever come, if he lived to be seventy, when he could again feel as he had felt that half-moment ago, "What has all this to do with me? Why am I here?"

There had been at Rugby a Mr. Selby, a kind of half-fledged master, bearing

the same relation to the regular staff of public-school and university men that the riding-master of a cavalry regiment, when he holds a commission, bears to his brother officers. It had been Mr. Selby's business on certain occasions to hold the roll-calls ; to superintend many details of the administration which could not be called teaching, and to give instruction on some of the lower subjects taught in the modern school, on things such as the lower branches of arithmetic, book-keeping, and so forth, which are most necessary to those who aspire to a sound commercial education. During the last few weeks of his stay at Rugby, Willie had, by the desire of his guardians, been put under the instructions of Mr. Selby. He had been keenly sensible of the humiliation ; for it was very rarely that a boy out of the sixth was taken away from his classical studies to "serve tables" of percentage and discount and the rest of it.

As Willie sat making his entries, his mind went back to those lessons at the

end of the summer term. The yellow-brown front of "Big School" blazing in the afternoon sunlight; the quad deserted, for these lessons came on half-holidays, just before call-over, when all the rest of the school were preparing for the cricket-fields; or again, the sight as he came out of his lesson and tried, he and one or two others of the class, not to look as if they had been with Old Selby, when the boys would be pouring into Big School for call-over; some coming from the town in correct coats and jackets, but the main body, in flannels, a moving mass of white, but with caps of divers stripes and colours. Yes, he heard the noise of those feet upon the gravel, had even now in his nostrils the faint human scent which accompanies any crowd, while his fancy took him back once more to those days so near, so infinitely far away.

He came to himself with a start. Here in the dim house of toil; and in his ears the buzz of eighteen—fourteen—nine;

seventy-four—eight—eleven. He had been making the last two entries mechanically. He must go back and check them again. Nay, the one before that; was he quite certain about it? He got confused; and the awful thought that he might be held responsible for thousands of pounds if he made any mistake, made him compare his entries over and over again. And the oftener he did this the more his thoughts seemed inclined to wander. O God! he must get this right; eleven hundred and seven—thirteen—nought; eleven hundred and seven—thirteen—nought; eleven hundred—hang it: that was right. Well, the next, ninety-four—three—eleven, all right; ninety-four, yes, no mistake about that; and now, seventy-seven, seventy-seven; hadn't he had that item once already? "No, I suppose not—seventy-seven—four—" Suddenly there rose before his eyes the beach at home, just as you saw it when you passed over the stream in the gap of the sand-hills. The sea holly beside him was white with

hoar-frost, and the little brook which came curling between the hills, had ice on its banks. The sea looked almost black out there beyond the sand, with white streaks upon it, and the sky was leaden. What he was most conscious of was the very keen scent of some sea-weed which was lying in a mass before him. Sea-weed was rare on their coast. This had been brought up by some recent storm, and now lay there in a bank above high-water mark, streaked with hoar-frost and smelling powerfully. Seventy-seven—four—eight, all the time he kept on repeating these numbers to himself, as the Thibetan repeats his, "Om—mani—padne —hom," as if they contained a charm.

"Who's that you've got there?" said Clay, the clerk with the prominent eyes, as he passed down the room, pausing a moment at Hanbury's desk, speaking *sotto voce*, but audibly enough to have been heard.

"Oh, a kid," said Hanbury rather uneasily. For he was a gentleman, and

did not want to hurt his neighbour's feelings. But he was proud of talking in the slang and tone of the U.L.P., to a distinguished athlete like Clay.

"How are you getting on?" he said, when the other had gone away, in his politest tones to the new-comer.

Willie started and felt guilty. His fellow clerk moved nearer to where he sat, and looked at the entries.

"I say; you're not getting on very fast. But of course it doesn't matter really. These are only a dummy lot. The sort of work they put a new hand on. Look here, I've got a quarter of an hour to spare. I'll call the amounts over to you and you can check 'em; you'll get on twice as quick that way."

Quite a gush of gratitude came into Willie Lancroft's heart. But, sorrow to tell! he felt ashamed of the feeling the next moment. What a state of mind he had been getting into over this rubbish, this dummy lot. And he felt that Hanbury had spoken too politely. So he tried his

best to over-master his gratitude and answered only with a sort of conventional politeness.

"Oh, thanks very much indeed, I shall get on much better that way."

Hanbury kept his word. But he at once returned to his shell, and Willie lost the chance of making friends with one of the not too many gentlemen among his brother clerks.

Before the quarter of an hour was finished Mr. Ebsthwaite once more appeared. "Have you done that?" and without waiting, for an answer, "This afternoon I think you will go down to the Clearing House with Mr. Beverley. He will show you what your duties there will ultimately be." And he walked down the room, Willie Lancroft following just half a step behind.

A well-dressed, well-built young man of about Lancroft's own height, was sitting on the corner of a desk, swinging one leg, and talking to a friend, the clerk, in fact, who had just now paused

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at Hanbury's desk. The two clerks made no pause in their talk when Mr. Ebsthwaite came up; only that the clerk who was swinging his leg withdrew it from the desk, and stood leaning on the desk only. Willie was introduced to them in succession with the same ceremony as before, "Mr. Beverley, Mr. Lancroft: Mr. Clay, Mr. Lancroft." Then Mr. Ebsthwaite explained to the former what he would have to do with the new clerk.

Mr. Beverley had curly red hair, and a pleasant straight mouth with red underlip. Mr. Clay had straight black hair, cut short, prominent grey eyes, a small head with a long neck and large collar. His shoulders were square, and he held himself like a man in good athletic training.

As Hanbury had noticed about the "kid" chiefly the fact that he had a pleasant expression about the mouth, so these took note chiefly of Willie's strong build and masculine shoulders.

"What do you go in for," said Beverley

to him as soon as Mr. Ebsthwaite had left them. "By Jove, he ought to bowl with a pair of shoulders like that."

Clay nodded assentingly, and squared his shoulders still more.

"I went in for football chiefly at school," Willie answered.

"What school was that?" said Beverley.

"Rugby."

"Oh, my! That's a very good school, isn't it? Did you know Wharton there?"

"I don't remember anyone of that name."

"Oh, well; he was a cousin of my mother's," said Beverley with affected indifference. "His father was a canon or some sort of clerical don in those parts I know. I suppose it's some time since he left Rugby. But I know he was at that school." And Willie, on whom all his earliest school-boy associations had come back, felt proud of the approving notice of these two, whom, by their style and

bearing, he knew instinctively took a certain rank among their brother clerks, such as a boy in the first eleven, or in the fifteen takes at school.

It was on Beverley that he felt an especial reliance; partly because from some accident of association he always felt a peculiar attraction towards red-haired people and trust in them. He was ashamed of this sense of reliance and dependence; but still he felt it. Two hours in the bank had been enough to make him feel as much *dépaysé* as if he had wandered to the centre of Africa; and instinctively he attached himself to anyone who seemed friendly.

"Well," said Beverley, "I'm off to lunch. Are you coming along, Clay? I suppose you don't know where to go for lunch?" he continued, half turning to Willie. "Let's take him to the Templeton," he said to his companion.

CHAPTER IV.

The three clerks passed through a side door from the Bank into a court, beyond which, framed by the entrance, Willie could see a moving panorama of pedestrians, cabs, carts and omnibuses—on the latter the rows of legs upon the roof, all the rest of the passengers being cut off from sight, looked especially quaint—now and again a private carriage. When they emerged into it they found the narrow street crammed with vehicles, the drivers swearing at each other, pedestrians threading in and out under the horses' noses. Clay, who was the first of the three, at once proceeded to do the same without looking round. Beverley turned to see if the new clerk were coming, and Willie, though with inward palpitations, had to follow with-

out hesitation. As it was, both the other clerks had been obviously waiting for half a minute or so when he emerged out of the whirlpool, trying to keep the expression of his face stolid and calm. Clay set off again at once: Willie got elbowed and pushed into the street, or sworn at when he made his weight felt by forcing his way through the crowd: sometimes he had to run a few steps in the gutter, in order to keep close behind his comrades. At last Clay stopped a moment, looked to see if the others were near, and then dived out of sight down some steps.

Willie followed and found himself in a vast underground area with low roof and long paved passages. They seemed to stretch endlessly. Figures in high hats and low were hurrying along on all sides and in many different directions; and as he walked quickly along, but almost always just in rear of his companions, Lancroft caught many rapid visions which were lost as quickly: here a crowd

of men standing at a bar: within there other crowds, and, between the crowds, clusters of shaded gas-lamps the appearance of which was familiar to Willie, but not familiar enough for him to say at once "billiards." Then past a book-stall like a station book-stall; so that he began vaguely to think this must be an underground railway. Then they dived down again, and came to another vast area.

From hence a great roar of voices assailed his ears, mingled with the clattering of plates and dishes. A great crash which came at the moment of their entrance seem to greet them; it was followed by a loud "Hollo" from half the voices at that end of the room. He perceived numberless hats grouped round a bar which stretched in a long oval far back in the dim-lit room. The place was like a huge kitchen, low-roofed, stone paved, and ever with the same clatter of plates and chatter of voices. Into Willie's mind there flashed the memory of a

passage in Dante which surely must have been meant to describe this scene :—

> " Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,
> Parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,
> Voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle." . .

He remembered no more—could, indeed, remember or think of nothing particularly. Only with this recollection of Dante, so strange for a school-boy, there sprang into his thoughts, what was never far from them, the romance of his life—the romance, this too of a school-boy—his passionate admiration of Mr. Sloane-Jarvis. . .

. . . . .

" Well, U.L.P.," said a man coming up and giving Beverley a smart slap on the back, " are you coming down to the House this afternoon ? "

" Damn y'r eyes," said Beverley. " You blasted London and Westminster."

At this moment half a dozen fresh clerks made their way to this end of the room, and were vociferously greeted by

some of those already seated; and an uproar arose on all hands.

"Well, Tommy, we've beaten you this journey, at any rate."

"Here, Muddy, make a bit of room."

"Go to Hell," said Clay, the man addressed.

"I thought you Couttses were never going to get done."

"Hallo! who's that you've got there?" This, Willie supposed, referred to himself. But he did not see the speaker.

. . . . .

"Where are you going to daïne to-naïght, Richard?"

. . . . .

"I'll give you twenty points in a hundred, and knock *your* old head off any way."

. . . . .

"Here, Charles, bring that blooming pie here, that's for me."

"You ——, what have you done with my hat?"

"Did you say pressed beef, sir?" said

the waiter, putting a plate in front of Willie. He had said nothing, but thought he might as well take what was before him.

"Confound you, Charles, that beef was for me," said another voice a little way down the bar.

"Beg pardon, sir, that gentleman asked for beef, didn't you, sir? Perhaps I was mistaken, sir." And he whisked off the plate again.

"What did you let him do that for?" said Clay, with a touch of patronage which was meant to be good-natured. "Hi, Charles, what did you mean by taking my friend's beef?"

"Beg pardon. Don't think the gentleman asked for beef. Did you, sir?"

"No. But I want some," said Willie.

"Oh, well," said Clay, turning away to speak to a friend.

"In a moment, sir. Pressed beef or roast, sir?"

. . . . .

"Hollo!" said a little clerk with a

smooth-shaven face and a curious young-old look, who had come in lately and sat down near Willie, "you're Lancroft, ain't you. I daresay you don't remember me; I left Brooks's just one half after you came, I fancy."

"Oh, of course I do—Scobell." Willie beamed with delight and felt quite proud of this recognition, though Scobell had been anything but a shining light at Rugby; had been no great swell at sports, and had never succeeded in getting into upper school. The recognition, too, posed Willie somewhat in the eyes of his two fellow-clerks; for Scobell was a clerk in a private bank, and that constitutes the aristocracy of bank-clerkdom. Scobell shook hands likewise with Beverley and Clay whom he knew slightly. . . .

"Well, I shall just have a look in at the bar and see if Freddy's there," Scobell said presently; and the four clerks passed behind a counter, and to the rear of some barrels into an inner room.

"Will you take anything?" Scobell said to Willie when they were seated before the bar; and he repeated the invitation to the other two.

"I?—no—yes. I think I'll have another glass of beer. A glass of bitter, please," he said to the barmaid.

"Morning, Fred. A glass of bitter for this gentleman and a cold whiskey for me, please. My eyes! where did you get those geraniums?" said Scobell.

"They're not geraniums, Mr. Scobell, they're pelargoniums;" the barmaid spoke with a certain grave hauteur. "And I got 'em from a friend."

"Well, I didn't suppose you got them from an enemy, Freddy deah. Now don't be angry with me, 'cause you know how I love you."

"I shouldn't take the trouble to be angry with you, I'm sure," said Fred. "Good morning, Mr. Baines," she said to a new-comer, with marked cordiality, to give emphasis to her snub.

"Isn't she a fine girl?" said Scobell to

Willie, in an audible aside, as Freddy placed their glasses before them.

The latter began to feel a certain tightening about his heart. Not that Freddy's looks were of a kind which would have attracted him if he had been alone. But she had an undeniable endowment of physical charms, and the sight of her surrounded by this bevy of men brought those charms into a certain relief, and affected Willie almost unconsciously to a quickening of his pulse.

"Now, none of your impertinence!" said Freddy, in reply to Scobell's whisper.

"Lord, Miss Arkwright! You don't mean that you're angry with me? Is she, Tommy?" This was addressed to the other barmaid, who, though of much less repute than Fred, was not wholly devoid of good looks.

"You're not worth anyone's while being angry with," said Tommy, but not in the same condescending tone which the other had used towards Scobell.

"Well, I'm worth being friends with. You try if I'm not, Tommy. You come onto the river with me next Sunday. Will you now? Say yes."

"Certainly not, Mr. Scobell," said Tommy, tossing her head. "I don't know how you could ask me to do such a thing."

"Oh, well, I won't ask it. We'll talk of it another time."

Scobell turned round and began to talk to Clay and Beverley.

. . . . .

Another group of U.L.P clerks had settled themselves a little to the back of Willie Lancroft. They were discussing among themselves, and in an undertone, the merits of the two popular barmaids.

"Oh, Fred's all right," Willie heard say the clerk who had been introduced to him as Mr. Pine. "She expects to marry a lord."

"'Oo's that chap she goes out with so much? I saw her going in to dine with

'im at Gatti's last night," said another clerk.

"Oh, I expect that's Archie Fortescue. They say he'd marry her to-morrow if she'd have him."

"*Who* is the chap? A beggar with curly hair, isn't it? I've seen him with her, I fancy," said a third voice.

"Yes. That's Archie Fortescue. Oh! You can't help having seen him and Fred."

"What is he, d'you know?"

"I fancy he's a solicitor in the city. It's odd I shouldn't know, too, quite what he is, for I've played billiards with him here half a dozen times."

"I expect he gets a chance now and then, don't he?"

"Not he. I'll bet she takes good care of that."

"That's just what always beats me," said a voice with a serious, inquiring tone. "How does a girl like Freddy Arkwright, for instance, when she's got a dozen men or so always hanging about her all day,

and knows she's only got to pick and choose the one she likes best, how does she keep straight? I'm damned if I know."

"If she does?"

"Well, lots do at any rate."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"Oh, yes they do," this was the voice of Pine again. "Well, they're made different from us. That's all you can say."

"Well, I wish they weren't."

"Oh, my God! did you hear Tommy Redfern? He says that he wishes they weren't made different from us."

Scobell now got up to go. The other three did the same. "Oh, I've paid," the old Rugbeian said, with a surprised air, when Willie asked the barmaid what he owed her. "I asked you what you'd take. Meet you here to-morrow, I hope."

After this there was a threading of fresh courts and streets under the guidance of Beverley until, up one narrow court

paved with stone, they passed a crowd of men who were throwing letters into the gigantic mouth of a letter-box, and then came to a low building with double pairs of glass doors. Between the two pairs sat a man at a desk. He spoke a word to Beverley, who passed in, holding the door open for Willie to follow. The large, low room was lighted entirely from above. It was full of long desks, and on the front of each desk was a label, white letters on a black ground. "Glynn," "Robarts," "National Provincial," "London and County," were on these labels; "Union, London and Provincial" was on a desk near the farther end.

Beverley was greeted by many voices as he walked down the room.

"Late again, U.L.P. I want your account with Barclay and Bevans."

"Are you rowing in Sunbury regatta, Beaver?"

"Oh, I say, how about Clay? I hear he's in for the scullers' handicap."

"What does he get?"

"Williams's a moral for that."

Then a stentorian voice at Willie's ear called out, "London and Westminster, I want you."

"No, not both at once?" cried a little clerk, swinging round upon his bench.

Willie began to notice that, though everybody joked with perfect unconstraint, the pens they held in their hands moved up the columns of figures as if of their own accord, and the work seemed to get itself done almost without the volition of the worker coming into play. He recalled his own blundering efforts of the morning in a much quieter room and without hurry. That, too, seemed ages ago now. Then Beverley called to him.

"Just run over these items to me," he said.

And the rest of the afternoon was spent in desperate efforts on Willie's part to keep his mind concentrated on his work, to shut out the noise which surged round him, and to dispel the drowsiness which crept over him in that

heavy atmosphere. Was he asleep or awake, he had to ask himself many times in the course of the long afternoon. And every now and then, Beverley's voice came like a warning bell,—

"Oh, I say, that can't be right. Let's look. Why, you said seventeen fifteen pounds. It's seventeen pounds, fifteen shillings."

CHAPTER V.

It was half-past six. The lamps were all lit in the streets and shining on the damp asphalte pavement, which reflected, too, the dying light in the sky; but the narrower streets (mere alleys they seemed) on either side of Willie as he walked along, were already given up to the night. He was going westward, and with him went a continued stream of people, all moving in the same direction. The lingerers among the "gutter merchants" stood lining the way like sparse sentries, they and their trays making a coloured fringe upon this dark ribbon of moving shapes. Willie had dined in company with Beverley, Clay, and another of his new colleagues; but had made an excuse of unpacking to do, and had not gone with them to the Grecian to hear

the great Dick Sumarez (pronounced Summarez) in some of his celebrated East-end ballads.

That day had been like a century. What had happened? Who was he? Not Lancroft, of Brook's House. No, never more that. It was against nature that the second captain of Brook's House should have felt such an exaggerated sense of gratitude to Hanbury for being helped through the business of entering a "dummy lot" of cheques, should have felt some pride in the notice of Beverley and Clay. Clay! To think of it, with his impudent eyes and spotted necktie. What would Mr. Sloane-Jarvis have thought of Clay? For, as has been said, Mr. Sloane-Jarvis was the romance of Willie Lancroft's life, and never for any long time out of his waking thoughts.

And with this remembrance Willie lost consciousness of all his surroundings. He was once more in the little sitting-room among the select few whom that ideal of men and school-masters had,

since his advent to Rugby, been wont to gather round him one night in every week for tea and Dante readings. There shone the well-appointed tea set, silver tea-pot and silver cream-jug, old Worcester cups without handles—only Harboard, it was said, had seemed quite at ease with cups of this sort, the first time the sixth form fellows came to tea with Mr. Jarvis—the two silver candlesticks, the handsome velvet curtains. A tiny room, but an æsthetic paradise, and heaven-on-earth to Willie Lancroft.

Willie, who had only been in Lower Bench, owed it to his reputation as a writer of verse (Latin and English) that Mr. Sloane-Jarvis had invited him to share in these Dante readings. Once—oh pride !—he had suggested (not at the time, but privately and with many hesitations and blushes), a way out of a difficulty in the rendering of one of the sonnets in the *Vita Nuova*, of which Mr. Jarvis sometimes read parts of his translation, and the master had accepted the

emendation. Mr. Sloane-Jarvis was engaged upon a complete translation of the *Vita Nuova*, prose and verse, a work which progressed in a stately fashion. But he wrote original verse as well; and after this proudest event in Willie's school career, Mr. Jarvis had been moved now and again to read some of his original verse to the latter. Thus a closer tie was established between the master and this pupil. They henceforth might rather be called master and disciple.

Sloane-Jarvis had never encouraged the schoolboy code which places physical strength and agility above all other gifts; and under his influence Willie had grown to be less proud of his goals and touch-downs. Henceforward he had devoted himself secretly, but seriously, to the thought of his future career, which he was quite determined was to be the career of a poet. He was going, he determined, in time to make even the best and wisest of men proud to call him his friend. And now to find himself

flattered by the notice of Beverley and Clay !

In New Ormond Street, the half daylight had given place to night by the time Lancroft got to his lodgings, and, with some fumbling, he opened the door with his latch-key and went down the narrow passage to his room. The passage smelt of stale tobacco and of onions. The little room was dark, except for the light of a street lamp which came slantwise through the side window ; and Willie passed through the sitting-room into the bedroom beyond. This was lighted only by a skylight, and through that some faint remains of daylight found their way. He felt tired and dirty, but withal a thrill of intense pleasure as he poured out the water from his chipped jug, and set to work to wash off all remembrance of his working day.

Then he returned to his sitting-room, made shift to light the lamp and looked around him. With a growing sense of excitement he took in the aspect of this

room. The contrast which this place presented to that other one, the ideal home of an ideal poet, which had, a few moments previously, risen before his imagination, could not dim his secret sense of delight in taking possession of this, which was to be for the future his castle, his citadel.

It was a little parlour-room which had had one angle truncated, and had thus been turned into an irregular pentagon. In that narrow fifth side stood the window. The room was papered a dark reddish brown; but no pattern was any longer discernible in it, none at any rate in this lamplight from where Willie stood. Next beyond the window came the fireplace, and opposite to that a glass bookshelf, in the upper part, wherein Willie had, the night before, arranged his small library. On the lower shelf stood his prize-books, gorgeous in calf and gilding, most of them with the dear familiar Rugby arms (a fesse between three griffins' heads)—Macaulay's essays, a

Cambridge Shakespeare, Jowett's Plato; and with these some of his larger school books, Liddell and Scott, Smith's Latin Dictionary, and so forth. Next above, on one side, his favourite classics, Virgil, Sophocles and Euripides; Æschylus was too hard, Aristophanes and Horace he did not much care for. For Willie Lancroft was very serious-minded in those days. Livy was the only prose author for whom he had any special affection; Plato he read in translation. On the other half of this shelf stood English poetry; Milton in half-calf, a Keats in the same, a single-volume Coleridge in blue; four or five volumes each of Tennyson, Browning and Wordsworth, and along with these, the greatest treasure of all in Willie Lancroft's eyes, a "Divina Commedia" (Fraticelli) well-bound and inscribed within, "H. E. Sloane-Jarvis to his friend," (his friend, ye gods!) "W. Lancroft." On the highest shelf were a medly of novels and stories, old and new, all in single volumes: "Emma," the

"Vicar of Wakefield," "Vanity Fair," "Esmond," "Pendennis," De Quincey's "Opium Eater," "Roderick Random," "David Copperfield," "Pride and Prejudice," "Silas Marner," Gaboriaus, in translation, Besants, Hardys, in yellow covers.

The wall opposite to Willie, opposite to the bedroom door, contained the one picture which the room boasted—a large picture in a maple frame, whereof one corner was discoloured by mould and dust. The title was almost effaced; the picture showed a group of men, among whom the Duke of Wellington, wearing a star, was distinguishable, seated round a table in such pose as always to display not less than a profile to the spectator; as if they were trying to realize the notion of a company of Misters Facing-both-ways.

All these things Willie took in; and then, with a sort of mental caress, his thoughts flew back to the inner room which he had just left, where, the night

before, he had locked away, in one of the drawers of his chest, a certain manuscript-book which no eyes but his had ever perused. It contained his essays in poetry, poems of all kinds, sonnets beginning, "Oh, Nature, all thy ways are beautiful," and (written last month) "Nurse of my youthful years, Rugby, wast thou," and one (this, too, was quite a recent composition), addressed to Mr. Sloane-Jarvis. It began, "Jarvis, who wast my master, yet my friend." ("Friend" rhymed to "condescend" —"While others careless passed, didst condescend. . . .") But, though no alternative suggested itself, the audacity of this beginning "Jarvis" had weighed upon the writer, and he was obliged to confess that, despite the theme, it was not one among his efforts which he could have sent to the begetter of it. This form of hero-worship was the only kind of passion which Willie had as yet known. Albeit, on one side, his poems did graduate down to lighter lyrical

pieces, to love-lyrics such as one which began,—

> Deep in the hyacinth's recess
> The buried honey lies ;
> But, ah ! the sweetness who can guess,
> That dwelt in thy dear eyes.

Love-verses such as are written by those who do not yet know what love is.

On the other hand, the poetry rose in gravity and pretensions up to an ode—to Nature, to God in Nature. Nay, in truth, Willie scarcely knew what this ode was to be. It was his latest work. It might even expand to become a sort of epic.

Yes. There it lay—who knows—should he? No, not to-night. But what nights after nights there would be ! After all, all life was before him. Oh, wondrous thought ! The whole of a human life ; all its unnumbered nights and days. What might not be made of that vast sum ? He rushed to his book-shelf, seized his Wordsworth, and read,—

> Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room,
> And hermits are contented with their cells,
> And students with their pensive citadels. . . .

To what an infinite distance had faded away the Union-London-and-Provincial-Bank, Beverley, Scobell, Mr. Ebsthwaite !

But he and Mr. Sloane-Jarvis were at one. The externals of the ideal life were nothing. They were both poets; for that he, Willie Lancroft, would be a poet he had quite determined. And then he began repeating to himself the latest beginning of his ode or epic. It had been begun half a dozen times.

> My soul has wings (it began),
> And high as to the gate of heaven upsprings;
> But, ah ! my words are leaden-shod and slow,
> And will not follow where my thoughts can go.
> Though these should soar my words still stay
> below. . . .

A knock came at the door, and Mrs. Bennett, the landlady, appeared with the tea-tray.

"I thought I 'eard you come in, sir," she said. "My daughter, Lavinia's just gone out to the chemist's ; 'er toothache's so bad. It's a curious thing ; it always seems like as if it must be bad come a wet day, no matter 'ow warm it is. She

suffers a great deal in 'er teeth, does Lavinia. But before she went she got your lamp ready. Because Mr. Lancroft —our old Mr. Lancroft, as we call him now—he was so very perticular about having his lamp first thing when he came in, and Lavinia thought, very likely being his brother—"

"Hope, you mean?" Willie stammered. "Oh, he's my cousin."

"Oh, indeed! oh, yes! I remember now; my daughter told me, only I forget things. You don't favour 'im over much, as my 'usband used to say. He was a Birmingham man, was my 'usband. I was born Guildford way myself. You've not 'eard from 'im lately, 'ave you, sir?"

"My cousin? N—no, I have never heard from him in my life, as far as I remember."

"Well; he was a very pleasant gentleman. It was about the lamp I was going to tell you. I'd almost forgot it, only Lavinia reminded me how perticular

'e used to be. And just the same if he didn't stay in the room ten minutes. Sometimes he'd be out of the room five minutes after he'd lit 'is lamp, and not come in again all night, and leave the lamp there burning. I was afraid to go to bed with the thing burning like that, lest it should explode, you know, sir; and so I was obliged to tell him. He was wonderful clever at drawing, was Mr. Lancroft—our old Mr. Lancroft, I should say—I've got a picture of my daughter that he did in my room; did I show it you, sir? I forget. So you don't 'ear over much of Mr. Lancroft, though you are the same name. Well, 'e owed me a trifle of rent, that I must confess. But I should like to 'ear if he's doing well now. It wasn't much, I forget 'ow much now, I'm sure, though I've no doubt Lavinia's got the book somewhere. You didn't say if you'd like some tea, but I thought most likely you would, sir."

"Yes, I should, please. W—what time is it?"

"About nine o'clock, sir. Nine o'clock, that was the time Mr. Lancroft he always had his tea, so Lavinia thought most likely you'd do the same; not that he was very often in to tea. But he always took strawberry jam with his tea, and my daughter she just got a pot ready, thinking you might take it too. But if you don't we shall be very 'appy to eat it, I'm sure."

Hope! How odd to have the old lady talking about Hope; though Willie remembered the next moment that these had been Hope's rooms when he was in London. Since the meeting of the two cousins at the funeral in the early summer —and even before that meeting—Hope, from the stories about him that filtered to them, had become a strange and semi-mythical being to the Speilby Lancrofts.

The elder cousin had now carried out that "tremendous scheme" which he had hinted at; and it was tremendous enough in the estimation of all the sober Lancrofts of both families. He had come of

age in June, and inherited a sum of two hundred pounds left him by his godfather (who a century earlier would have been described as Mr. Godfred Lancroft's patron), Lord Hope-Towers. And with that two hundred pounds he had simply disappeared. He had gone, as a matter of fact, no farther than Paris. But anywhere, across the sea, seemed to the body of the Lancrofts almost indefinitely remote. And Hope had left no address, no trace of his whereabouts—so far at least as Willie knew. He declared his hatred of the business of his architect's office (whereof he had in truth too small an experience to be a competent judge), and his determination to be an artist. That was all. He had not asked or obtained leave. He had simply gone. At this moment he began to enter as a disturbing element into his cousin's life, simply by the souvenir which he left behind. It was a tremendous adventure, a wonderful leap into the arms of chance. Even Mr. Sloane-Jarvis's poet's sanctum

seemed less interesting now that this picture of wild freedom had arisen. Willie tried to concentrate his attention on Wordsworth as he ate his tea.

> And hermits are contented with their cells,
> And students—

"I wish I had asked her some more about Hope," he said. "I must to-morrow. . .

> And students with their pensive citadels.

'Sometimes he wouldn't come in again all night.' In what a quiet commonplace way she said that!"

It gave Willie a sense of awe; but deep down also a sense of curiosity, of excitement.

CHAPTER VI.

Willie Lancroft laid down his book. Then he sat for a little time listening to the wind, which seemed to hurl splashes of rain against his window, and thereupon to hurry away towards the city groaning. At last he put on his thickest pea-jacket and oldest wideawake and sallied out into the streets.

Aimlessly he turned from street to street, from New Ormond Street into Southampton Street, and down to Holborn. London was all deserted in the tempestuous night. As he came into Holborn, the wind sweeping the street met him face to face; a soft, moist wind which seemed still to carry somewhere in its folds the sharp cry of the sea-gull beating above the surf. But outwardly it bore only gusts and splashes of sooty rain,

which washed the roofs and filled the gutters, and made the wet asphalte return the shining of the lamps. People cowered in the archways when the drifting showers came on. Necessity brought together for a moment strange companions: a barrister returning late from Lincoln's Inn in Inverness mackintosh; a little shopman, second-hand bookseller, as you might swear by his black, tight-buttoned, greasy frock; a hard-working girl, in black too, which brought into relief her sad, insignificant pale face and hay-coloured hair; two girls of the miscellaneous half-thief, half Crosse-and-Blackwell or laundry-worker type from St. Giles's, and with them a young man of like aspect; an unmistakable "cadger," with his toes showing through his boots: these had chance collected together to be momentary companions on the high road of life. Willie half took in the aspect of each as he passed them by and pressed on eastward.

The cabmen at the stand, such as

were visible, cowered under their tarpawlings and swore at their horses, which shook themselves and backed when the squalls of rain caught them. On and on, and they were left behind. Willie's spirits rose at all these sights. Wind or calm, sunshine or lamplight, what mattered it to him? Had he not two stout legs under him that knew no fatigue?

And now he was suspended a moment wonderfully in mid-air, and the street and the street lamps stretched below him till they diminished to the size of toys, he himself upon the level of the nearest garret windows; a world of people in these garrets—the pale seamstress, the cobbler bending over his work, the maker of penny spy-glasses, of chain purses, the mechanic almost sober, the labourer not yet quite drunk, shrunken wives, crying children, an awful world! Next a black pile rose before him. Willie knew already what pile this was. Behind it who could tell how many had dropped

from life into eternity; while at his left hand rose towards the sky the church and the church tower, which for generations after generations had tolled the doom of these unhappy ones. And while this thought flashed into his mind, Willie caught a glimpse of an ethereal dome hanging, as it were, between earth and heaven, and made fantastic and unreal in that faint, reflected light.

He went on and on. The houses grew higher, the streets grew narrower, and more silent and dark. Of a sudden he came to a building which was lit up. It had, he saw, green-shaded lamps in the upper storeys. That seemed the end of all humanity. When he had passed that point he entered upon a city of the dead; narrow alleys leading out of narrow streets and into tiny, shrouded courts, now all silent and deserted: the most solemn sight this which London contains —the city on a dark, wet night. He had passed these things in the daytime. But they were unrecognizable now, and

most like a city seen in dreams. Willie Lancroft had almost forgotten his own personality. He could fancy that those resounding footsteps were not his own, but echoes condemned to haunt this place, echoes which once—a few hours or a hundred years ago?—busy merchants, clerks, chafferers, cheats and honest men, taskmasters and slaves had awoken while they were still on earth. And he almost started when the silence was suddenly broken by a clattering and shouting, as out of a dark alley came a troup of half a dozen shadowy figures—shadowy in the light of a high electric lamp down the street—boys on roller skates. A moment, and they disappeared down the opposite lane and he was alone once more.

All the doings of the day came back to him mingled with a hundred thoughts or adumbrations of thoughts which were to be understood and distinguished only in the course of years.

All the talk that he had heard to-day,

the conversations of his brother clerks, how insignificant, how coarse and vulgar they were! He turned from them with loathing. He turned from them; and yet they, as it were, came back and met him again. In short, sharp outlines and clear accents the events of this day came back to him. What was it that, despite himself, made them seem to Willie so full of significance? He could not answer. But from some great depth within him an unspoken answer came. They were *life;* part of the actual life of the world, which up to that day he had stood aside and seen pass by him. In vain he evoked the influence of Mr. Sloane-Jarvis to exorcise these vulgar shapes. He felt that he belonged to them and they to him.

Then with all the repulsiveness there mingled, too, a certain attraction. There was another side to this new life: liberty; "liberty to work, to invent, to create," he said to himself; but vaguely beside these ideas there began to dress itself in

his imagination a new influence, another side of life; an impalpable shadow; the mysterious, awful entity "woman" took faint shape in his thoughts, in a guise half romantic, half sensuous. Mrs. Bennett had struck a chord with that random confession of hers about Hope. Love, from having been in the coarser forms of it no more than a subject for schoolboy jests, and vague, speculative talk, presented itself suddenly as an integral part of the new life into which Willie Lancroft had been plunged.

. . . . .

Presto! He came to himself to find that he was in a city, a blaze of light. A broad street with low houses on either side stretched straight and endlessly before him. The low shops which bordered the street were all alight and flaring to the extent of their capacities. And, in addition to the fixed shops there ran along the edge of either pavement a row of temporary ambulant ones, with naphtha lamps suspended from their

awnings, outdoing the other shops in their glare. On every hand round these barrows surged a crowd of figures, interposing blackly between Willie and the naphtha lamps, or momentarily lit up by these, and revealing ruddy, wet faces in the red light. Strange to have suddenly emerged into this seething world!

"Now you blooming —, what're yer shoving at me for?"

. . . . .

"Now, gents. Buy, buy, buy. Prime English beef at sevenpence 'apenny the pound."

. . . . .

"Get 'long with yer. 'Ere, M'ria, I'm goyn this wy, — if I don't. *Don't*, Jim, yer lyve me 'lone, you — —, you.

. . . . .

"T'marters, mum, six a penny, mum. Let me put you up a dozen mum."

. . . . .

"You'd leave me and the children to starve in the streets, you would, ye narsty beast, you would, you. I'm not

afraid of you, you *beast*. I'll stick to you, I will."

. . . . .

These sounds were in Willie Lancroft's ears as he sped onwards. It had seemed at first as if the lights stretched endlessly before him. But all at once he found himself in a dull dark street along which a few silent figures were plodding.

And now he began to think of how he must retrace his steps. As he did so, he discovered that with those unbidden thoughts which had come into his mind just now, all the adventure and all the poetry had gone out of his walk. An hour or so before, he had had a vision of perfect independence, of complete detachment from human claims. His legs were strong enough to carry him for miles, for ever, for all that night at any rate. Now it was only half-past ten or so, and he was thinking how he must be turning homewards.

He had been studying the map of London. He knew that the Tower must

lie behind him, and he thought he would return by it and along the borders of the Thames.

"Well, yes, sir. You can git that way through Angel Court and Little Cooper Street. You'll come out to Cable Street at last," said a policeman. "But you'd best walk fast while you're going through them places."

The thought that there might be some adventure in his way, was a slight stir to Willie's spirits; and he walked through the courts and alleys, jauntily swinging his stick. But he met no adventures; and only saw here and there shadowy female figures, veiled like priestesses of Demeter (though they were, in fact, attached rather to the worship of the Thracian god), standing in the doorways or moving silently across the courts. It was still dreamlike, but more like a nightmare now than ever. All the bright imagination had gone from his night's walk; even when he emerged on Tower Hill, and dimly saw the historic fortress looming

on his left; and though the most beautiful part of his walk came anon, when, having threaded the dark ways of Thames Street, and passed beneath more than one gloomy arch, he emerged at length at Blackfriars Bridge, and saw the long Thames Embankment stretching its curve of lamps like a galaxy. Now the clouds had drifted away from the western sky, and a half-moon hung over the tower of Westminster afar off. Red and yellow lights were moving hither and thither, over the dark stream which flowed below without a sound.

> I see them all so excellently fair;
> I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.

These lines came into Willie's head; for the pleasure had gone out of his walk; a deep and unaccustomed melancholy had taken its place.

Suddenly, at the corner of Arundel Street, he was arrested by the sound of a man playing a guitar or some sort of stringed instrument, and singing harshly to it.

J. Callan

"O bella Napoli! O bella Napoli!"

the man drawled out through his nose. A woman half walked, half danced up to Willie, and held out her tambourine in her left hand towards him. He gave a penny, and having thus paid his footing stood still for a moment to listen; there were some half a dozen other shadowy figures listening too; the street was so dark that he positively had not seen them at first. All seemed strangely fantastic yet strangely familiar. And gradually the music, so to call it, working upon him, and playing upon his sudden onslaught of despondency or despair, his thoughts began to run towards versification. An uncaught rhyme went before him keeping tune to his footsteps as he walked on again. It was set to a sad measure.

"Cease to complain," it began. And all up Arundel Street, across the Strand, which was ablaze, and westward up Wellington Street (for now he shrank from the sight of squalor, and took only the lighted streets) he got no further

than this, "Cease to complain." "Not much poetry in that;" and yet it was somewhere. When he got to New Oxford Street, his ideas began to flow somewhat. The despair itself had left him; the echo of it only remained. He went on now with quite a glow of excitement, so that by the time he reached New Ormond Street he was almost in a perspiration, and his hand trembled as he fitted his latch-key into the lock. He could hardly wait till he had got out his manuscript-book, and written down the verses which he had composed on the way; and he read them to himself over and over again before he went to bed, with always fresh delight. He felt he had made a new advance in poetry-writing. For all the time the varied sensations of his walk, the solemn echoing streets, the flaring lamps, the silent dark flowing river, the shrouded figures in the courts seemed to combine and form a chorus to his verse.

But the next morning all these sensations had faded away. He took out his

MS. book, and read what he had written. "Cease to complain," it ran,—

Cease to complain. Eternity
Is not filled up: for you and me
  Are mansions in that silent House
  Still left apart, remote, untrod.
  No myriad-throated roar shall rouse
The ear once lulled in that abode.
And this our hour of fume and fret
  Is running on the sands of Time.
A million such did this beget,
And there shall be a million yet;
  But we must bear this one alone.
  Cease then, brother, from your moan.
But most because complaint is vain,
Cease to complain.

Alas! They were sadly commonplace, he thought. And there was the dull round before him again.

Still—yes. He had, he decided in the event, been in a measure inspired. And though the chief effect of this inspiration was to make him see what rubbish were, "O Nature, all thy ways are beautiful," and the like, that surely was something. He would persevere in trembling hope. Had not Mr. Sloane-Jarvis promised to come and look him up in London. He would help him and advise.

CHAPTER VII.

Beverley had been heard to assert, "that Lancroft is an awfully clever fellow, you know; he's read a lot." But Clay thought him rather a lout. He had nearly upset them in Sunbury lock, and broken one of the rowlocks of the boat which Clay and Beverley owned between them. Mr. Ebsthwaite did not consider him the most promising of the new clerks he had had to deal with, and was surprised to learn from Mr. Knowles that he had been reckoned clever at school.

The truth is, however, that Mr. Ebsthwaite, Clay, Hanbury, and many more of the clerks of the U.L.P., if they were in a manner hostile to Willie Lancroft, were so only because they had been so ready to make friends with him. Now, because he had not understood their advances,

they thought him stuck-up, eccentric, a queer card. He had a vague feeling that they did not like him, that they were not worth the trouble or the loss of dignity involved in gaining their good opinion. And yet there was much music, excellent voice in each of the beings by whom he was surrounded, if Willie had had the art to make it speak. In Hanbury, for example, son of a poor Devonshire clergyman of family, poor and proud, and of an excellent wit withal: in Pine, who was romantically in love with the daughter of an inn-keeper on the Thames, and who, ashamed of the sincerity of his passion, tried to conceal the true history of the affair (which was simple enough) under mysterious hints of Lotharian adventure; in Beverley, in Clay even. Each had his claim of the interest which belongs to all human nature. Beverley alone remained Lancroft's friend; more at first through his inherent good nature than from any special attraction towards the new clerk.

Against all unfavourable judgments,

however, was to be set the undoubted fact of Willie's strength. In rowing it could not be denied that he made a boat go, though his style, which had been acquired in sea rowing, did not adapt itself readily to the Thames. And when the days of rowing passed, Willie became conspicuous among the bank football-team on the rare occasions when, during the short months, it found time to play. Now the months were beginning to lengthen again, and Willie had nearly completed his first half-year at the bank.

. . . . .

But where in the meantime was Mr. Sloane-Jarvis? It was on him more than on any other mortal or thing that Willie's secret hopes rested. But months had passed on and he had not come to "look up" his old friend. Willie had heard from him once, and replied. He had said in his letter that he was going back to Oxford after Christmas (he was a Fellow of All Souls now). He should most likely be in town in the Christmas vac.

Would Lancroft be there during any of the time?

(Alas! too certainly he would be there. For the Union-London-and-Provincial gave but one fortnight's holiday a year to its younger employés. If Willie could get home for Christmas day, returning to town the evening of the following Sunday, that was the utmost holiday he could expect.)

But the Christmas vacation came and went, and no Sloane-Jarvis appeared upon the scene. The spring following Willie had a visitor of a different, but a very welcome, kind in the person of his younger sister. The affairs of the Lancroft family were found to be in a worse condition than was expected—than was expected at any rate by the widow and children of the deceased. The landlord allowed them to surrender their lease of the Abbey, and they were now settled in a cottage in Speilby St. Peter's, the adjoining parish. One of the girls, it was decided, would have to think of earning

her livelihood; and after consultations with Milicent Forbes in person and by letter, it was settled that Charlie should come to London to cram up for a "Cambridge intermediate." Accordingly, she took up her quarters with her brother in New Ormond Street.

. . . . .

Charlie could hardly believe it was real her first evening in Ormond Street, this rapture of an installation with Willie. To be ensconced in that room—his, their room—to be pouring out his tea herself, to have no one set in authority over her, to know that hours would pass—two hours at any rate—before they would either of them think of going to bed; that another evening would follow this evening and another that; that they might talk to their hearts' content: it was more bliss than one human being could bear. Her bright blue eyes shone —they were small but very bright and blue: Willie's were larger, more grey and more solemn—her face flushed and

glowed beneath the rich brown of its sea-air tint.

Over their tea they began to exchange the news.

"Oh, Willie," Charlie cried, "I forgot to tell you Uncle Godfred's been made a canon."

"No! has he?" answered the other. "I suppose he's awfully pleased; isn't he? Those Battersbys are quite the swells of the family now. In old days when they were at All-Syston we used to swagger over them like anything. I remember our taking them out for a sail once, and Hope got in such a funk. At least, he turned most awfully white. It may have been sea-sickness really, but Bob and I chose to say it was funk. He wanted to fight me afterwards, but Bob said that I was two years younger, and he would fight him if he liked."

And Willie's face grew grave at this remembrance of his elder brother, who had died eight years ago.

"Didn't he cut you once very badly?"

"That was at All-Syston the next year, just before—It wasn't a fight, though," Willie went on more briskly, to drive away sad thoughts; "he got into a rage when we were making a house in the sandstone rock and hit me over the head with a spade."

"How horrid of him! I wasn't there then. Didn't Hope live in these rooms once?"

"Rather! Mrs. Bennett tells awfully queer things about him."

"Well, he is very queer, isn't he? You know he never writes to Battersby—not even to Edith—and they don't know in the least what he's doing."

"I fancy he is a rum sort of chap."

"But what sort of things does your old lady tell you about him?"

"Oh, well, I don't know anything very particular. He was an awfully lazy chap for one thing—used to lie in bed sometimes till the afternoon."

"He was rather dirty as a boy, wasn't he? I know Carry and you used always to say so."

"Well, I should think he was rather. Well, in fact sometimes he stayed in bed the whole day and smoked nearly all the time, so this old lady, Mrs. Bennett says. He's most awfully fond of smoking, she says."

"That's what he got into such a row about at school—at Marlborough—wasn't it?"

"Y—yes—I believe it was. Sometimes he was tremendously hard up, Mrs. Bennett says, and hadn't got enough money to go out and get his dinner."

"Poor fellow! How dreadful! Did he spend it all, or didn't Uncle Godfred give him enough, or what?"

"I fancy Uncle Godfred kept him pretty tight, but that he spent all he had or could get. He used to paint little pictures for shops, she thinks; and she says he wrote letters or something, but I don't quite know what she means."

"Only fancy! It must have been rather fun though," mused Charlie, settling her elbows on the table and

looking with rapturous eyes into the fire.

"Yes, I daresay it was rather. Then he knew he had the hundred or two hundred pounds or whatever it was coming to him when he was of age," her brother said, with a sigh. "Do you often go over to Battersby?" he went on, to change the subject.

But Charlie had gone off on a train of thought of her own.

"Uncle Godfred always *seemed* so very nice," she said. "We used to admire him so much—don't you remember?—when we were children, and mamma and Carry do still tremendously . . . No, I don't go there very often. Carry goes oftener than I do; she's more Edith's friend, of course, and it costs money to be always going."

"Everything costs money, unluckily," said Willie, growing discontented.

"It's much jollier being here," said Charlie, still in her enraptured tones. "I say, Willie," she added, after a

moment's pause, "do you—do you write any poetry now?"

"Oh, well—sometimes."

"I *wish* you'd read me some."

"Oh, I don't think I can."

"Oh, *do*, will you? Do you remember that—that sonnet you read to me last spring sitting on the rock at Hardy's Point. It was just two months before father died," and her voice dropped into gravity for a moment.

"O Nature, all thy works are beautiful,

it began; and then there was something about—I know the verse ended—"

"It wasn't 'works,' as it happens," said Willie, testily. "That was a beastly one."

"But it must be so difficult to write a sonnet," said Charlie, soothingly.

"No, not a bad sonnet."

"But that wasn't bad, I'm sure, Willie. I thought it extremely pretty."

"*Pretty!*" ejaculated Willie, with scorn. "Well, it wasn't even pretty."

"Do read me some more," said Charlie, fearing she was getting on the wrong tack.

"No, I don't think I can. . . . Oh, well, perhaps I might."

"Oh, do; will you? That's a dear," and Charlie jumped at his neck.

"But we'll get rid of these things first."

"Oh, Willie! How *splendid* it is being here in London," said Charlie.

. . . . .

And for Charlie this splendour never wore off. Every morning to get up—no matter though she got up very early—and to remember that there were no household regulations to be obeyed. Charlie did not say to herself "no family prayers;" but it was family prayers that she chiefly had in mind. Then to come down into Willie's room, that paradisaical room of a quaint shape, to pour out his coffee, to walk a little way with him towards the city before she went to her coach in Gower Street. . . . She had, by the influence

of her uncle with the learned Bishop of Lincoln, obtained leave to read in the Reading Room of the British Museum, that solemn temple of learning over which is spread a hush and a solemnity like those of a church service, and under whose roof all sounds have a hollow echo as under the roof of a cathedral. There many of her mornings were passed.

She walked out to meet her brother somewhere about Holborn Viaduct—for the days were light till six and after—and together they would go sometimes to dinner at home, not seldom to some dining-room in Holborn or the Strand. Willie had an instinctive dislike to taking her where there might be a chance of encountering any of his brother clerks, so that their dinners abroad involved the search for fresh dining-places.

Then there were the pits of the theatres to be visited. Of these Willie was beginning to be *au fait*, but they were an unimaginable delight to his sister.

. . . . .

One Saturday afternoon when the brother had got away earlier than usual, and they were standing in a *queue* in the Strand waiting for the doors to be opened, Uncle Godfred, without seeing them, passed close by in company of another cleric in gaiters, and with a rosette on the front of his hat. Uncle Godfred himself wore a rosette, but not the gaiters.

Later on in the evening, as the two sat at dinner, they referred to this incident.

"I say, what would Uncle Godfred say if he could look in on us now?" said Charlie, with delight—

"Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor."

and she was so delighted with herself that she went on quoting though her mouth was full—

"Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,
If memory on their tomb no trophies raise,
Where in the ——"

"What is it, Willie? In the vault something I know; oh, yes,—

"Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The anthem — something — swells the notes of praise."

And she laughed, and then spluttered.

Willie in his turn began to quote in parody—

"Nor you, great guns, impute to us the fault,

he began,

"If not for us proud cooks their pastries raise,
No gilded menials wait to hand the salt,
And knives, bone-handled, cut the homely braize.

'braize' is poetical for braized beef, you know. That's what we're eating."

"Oh, I say, Willie, you *are* clever. But it should be 'pampered menials,' I am certain."

CHAPTER VIII.

"You wouldn't read me some poetry to-night, would you?" Charlie said, in a coaxing voice, when they were established again by their own fireside.

"My own? No, certainly not," said her brother.

"Then any sort."

"Any sort's just the same to you, Longfellow, or Tennyson, or Spenser, or any of the beggars."

"No, of course it isn't. You know I don't care for Longfellow, Willie. Oh, hang it" (there came a knock at the door), "is that tea?"

"Please, sir, please, miss," said the slavey, "there's a gentleman wants to see you."

"May I come in?" said a kind and

sonorous voice, with possibly an excessive heartiness in it.

The brother and sister had time to exchange one look. Then their tall uncle strode into the room.

"How cosy you look here," he said, when he had kissed Charlie and shaken hands with her brother, looking round the room. Nobody could say that Mr. Godfred Lancroft ever ceased to be himself; but there were shades of change in his manner. With young people, when he was in a good humour, he sometimes had an aggressive heartiness which the older ladies of his congregation would hardly have recognized as his. "How are you, Willie? Well, Charlie! You two are having a fine time, I'll be bound. I'll take off my coat, if you'll just lend a hand. Thanks," and he pulled up his stock with his left hand. "A fine time, I expect. I saw your mother, Charlie. She sent her love to you both. Carry is coming to stay with us at the end of the week. Edith's got

a lawn-tennis party or something. Rather too cold, I should say, for that sort of thing yet. . . . Tea? Yes, I should like some tea. But don't put yourself out if you weren't going to have it. Nice cosy little room, upon my word. I wish we had had you at Battersby last week, Willie," he said, presently. "It was the last match of the season, Battersby fifteen against Rearsby. Do you still keep—"

But here tea came in.

"These rooms were Hope's, you know," said Charlie, as she gave her uncle his cup; and she looked at him rather hard as she did so.

"Yes; so they were," he said. There was a perceptible change in his voice. Then he was silent.

"Have you heard from him lately?" Charlie continued.

"No, I've not. He's very bad about writing, I must say—too bad, much too bad. It worries Edith a good deal. It's really very selfish, very—No; I'm sorry about it," he said again, in a manner which

the older ladies of his congregation would have recognized.

"You've been made a canon, haven't you, Uncle Godfred?" Willie asked, trying in vain to shake off the boyish feeling which he always had when in his uncle's presence.

"Yes, yes, only an honorary canon; no grist to the mill, unfortunately," and Uncle Godfred returned to his old hearty manner. "Thanks; no more, no more; though it's capital cake. Do you do Willie's housekeeping now, Charlie? Well, well," he said after they had talked a little while longer. "I ought to be getting on my way," and he rose from his chair. "Getting on satisfactorily at the bank, I hope, Willie. Bousfield tells me that there's a first-rate chance for anyone who really shows—er—capacity. And you did so well at Rugby, I've no doubt you'll get—er—get to the top of the tree in no time," and he turned to take up his great-coat, perhaps with the object of precluding any reply to this last

remark. As he made his final adieux he added—

"You'll be home in a month or two for your holiday, I suppose; won't you, Willie? You must be sure to pay us a visit. Perhaps—it's possible—Hope will be over."

"I only get a fortnight," said Willie, with a touch of sullenness.

"Only a fortnight? Dear me; that's rather short commons, isn't it? I suppose that's just at first. Well, good-night. Good-night, Charlie dear. You look most flourishing; I shall be glad to tell your mother. Of course I shall go and see her directly I get back, almost. I can find my way out, I daresay. Oh, well, thanks. It is a little dark in the passage." (The lamp smelt abominably of paraffin; but he did not make any remark on that.) "That's right. Now let me see, Holborn lies over there, doesn't it? Oh, there, yes, of course. Oh, I shall find my way all right; thank you very much. *Good*-night."

Neither the brother nor the sister could have told precisely what impression this visit had left in their minds; and what is perhaps strange, they never compared notes—

The only thing Charlie said was—

"I wonder if there is really any chance of Hope turning up at Battersby this summer. It would be rather fun to see what he's like now."

"Yes, wouldn't it?" said her brother.

. . . . .

Charlie stayed and stayed. No poetry was written during these days. But together the brother and sister explored many stately avenues and shady pleasant by-paths of literature. Willie bought Elia's Essays, which were new to him; and the brother and sister as they read them thought of themselves as another Charles and Mary Lamb. Then Charlie had her books of history to get up; and many were the discussions, biographical, philosophical, which arose out of these. Willie knew little of modern

history; but for the classical part he would read and translate passages of Livy, and so rub up his Latin a little, which was already beginning to get a trifle rusty.

And they explored, too, all the outs and ins of the London streets, marking out fresh routes and tracing their ways upon the map; up through the squalid regions to the north, till they reached the bustle of Islington; or wandering round the dark Regent's Park to acres and acres of solid respectability—or what has all the look of it—in the regions beyond; or fronting the glare and rowdiness of the Strand; or the magic beauties of the Thames Embankment; the mysterious silence of the city; the unearthly activity of the East-end.

But on Sundays they would—sometimes (but not always) intermitting their religious observances for that purpose—change the character of their walks by making long rambles into the country. At first there had been nothing but the faint beginnings of spring to greet their

eyes; the grass that had put on a livelier green, the colt's-foot under the hedges, the curled spikes of the lords and ladies in the woods here and there. Then the primroses began to show, and the woods became white with windflowers; and there were patches of cuckoo-flowers over the meadows. Until at last, in the Kent and Surrey woods, they found all the shadowy places turning blue with the purple-blue of the hyacinths, and they would come home of an evening laden with spoils, of hyacinths, of red-robbin, of daisies, of multitudinous grasses and tendrils; young hops, bryony just beginning to grow; the beautiful young leaves of the oak all red, and the sycamore purple brown. Under Charlie's skilful arrangement their little room looked like a bower for three days afterwards; and Susan anathematized them under her breath.

After three months' coaching, Charlie went up for her examination and passed, and then went home. But when she had

gone Willie continued the country walks which they had instituted together. He took longer stretches still, now that he was alone, straight out of London for twenty miles, for thirty sometimes, till even his strength was exhausted, and he had to find his way to the nearest railway and to come back to London with a third-class company of half-drunken cadgers, bird-catchers, fern-diggers, fishermen, noisy boys, who crowded into the carriage when they got nearer town, with their still noisier sweethearts.

Then, when he had got back to his dim lodgings, and had placed in water the accumulated spoils of branches and flowers, all the mingled sensations of the day would rush back upon him, till he was seized by a kind of vertigo. The very commonplaceness of the streets and the street lamps seemed fraught with meaning for him, and vague reminiscences of all he had read, scraps of knowledge long forgotten, and other scraps picked up yesterday, came together

to produce a silent turmoil in his brain. With these reminiscences mingled the scent of the honeysuckle and the meadow-sweet, which recalled again the vast sum of country life as he had known it in all his past years till this year, its thousand different sounds—of cocks crowing, of groaning wains, of roaring smithies with the clink, clink of the hammer on iron, of winds and brooks, of the distant hum of a threshing-machine sounding like the wind through a forest of fir trees, and then again, as the ground tone to all this many-voiced harmony, the eternal sonorous voice of the sea. As he sat—as he had learnt to do—sipping his whisky and water in the evening after such a day's walk, the turmoil of these thousand voices grew only the greater and yet more clearly marked, with more of meaning in it. A conviction would grow with it that he, Willie Lancroft, did not belong to this present time nor to his actual surroundings ; that he was a part of some antique spirit, some perennial

essence of things. The vast World Spirit, the antique Pan-Theos had, he fancied, breathed him into life for a moment, to float there a brief second clothed in flesh, and then to disappear again into the essence whence he came.

> "The earth hath bubbles as the water hath,
> And we are of them——"

as he quoted with alteration to suit his present mood, and in an exquisite melancholy,

> "The earth hath bubbles as the water hath.

Soon, soon, shall I sink back into this primal essence of things which manifests itself in all these sights and sounds—in winds and floods, in the chants of birds, in all the voices of human toil."

"But what of the voices of toil and of pleasure here in London?" came the sudden thought; "'of fifteen-fourteen-nine?' of 'London and Westminster I differ from you?'" and a reminiscence came to him of Gill, one of the clerks, as he had heard him on Saturday morning

as he went into the bank, "Aï was awfully cut larst naïght."

He drove this obstinate question away. This was a mere discordant note in the harmony of the world. And vaguely, but with more meaning than heretofore, he began to roll in his mind the conception of the great epic of Nature which had always haunted him. It was to take the form of the Spirit of Nature, of the Pan-Theos (he ignored his genders in order to give a double meaning to the word), manifesting itself in the lives of mankind through generation after generation. He was deep in Keats at the time. The majestic blank verse of Hyperion, he determined, was the fittest to express this grand, this universal epic. And for some time after this Willie hammered on under a new inspiration and in a new style.

Then one day he read over all he had written—he had bought a new note-book for that special purpose—and put it all aside. He did not burn it, but he locked it up at the bottom of his lowest drawer.

For a time all his poetical effusions followed suit. They were locked up and abandoned.

. . . . .

But meanwhile Willie grew more accustomed to his life. His fellow-clerks were less uncongenial to him. He threw himself once more vigorously into the sports in which he had been distinguished at school and at home—football, boxing, rowing, in all which his weight and great personal strength told in his favour. And the succeeding years rolled by more placidly, if more monotonously, than this first one had done.

. . . . .

CHAPTER IX.

It was six years after the events recorded in the first chapter of this book, the funeral of Mr. Robert Lancroft, the interment of the fine prospects of his son.

Edith Harwood sat alone in her little drawing-room, with a certain palpitation of the heart which she did not attempt to conceal from herself. She was momentarily expecting the arrival of her brother, Hope. It was such an age since she had seen him; and, though it was Hope who had deserted her, not she her brother, still the sense of his old supremacy was strong in her, and she could not help dreading just a little the judgment which his keen eyes would pass on her and her surroundings. Not that it really mattered; for now Edith's thoughts,

as they always did after each short flight, came back with a delicious sense of security to the certain fact of her husband, the fact that she was married happily—this last was, perhaps, the essence of her sense of happiness and peace. (There are some brides to whom marriage means the husband; others to whom the husband means the marriage.) Whoever else might have failed in the great enterprise of a woman's life, she had conspiciously succeeded. Hope might pretend to think as he chose, but he would be as glad as anybody that his sister had married a gentleman. Edith looked round the room; it did not matter that it was only a smallish room and that they lived on Craven Hill; for was not her husband the brother of the squire of Battersby? Nobody could get behind that fact. And wasn't he, moreover, a splendid specimen of the English gentleman? Hope, in fact, must admire Berrie; but what would Berrie think of Hope? In spite of herself, Edith could

not help being a little glad that her brother had been out of the way almost entirely since Frank Harwood had come to live at the Park. And at this hint her memory began unbidden to draw a picture of the many ways in which she and Hope had drifted apart in thought, in plans, in ideas, in habits since the old days when whatever their stepmother thought right stood by that mere fact condemned in their eyes.

"Ah! there it is!" Edith said to herself. She heard the hansom stop before the door; she could almost distinguish Hope's step upon the pavement, and his very ring had something in it which she knew again. "Dear Hope! What fun it will be meeting again!"

She had cried once bitterly over that desertion of his, as she remembered now with a sort of wonder. And then, once more, as she went out upon the landing, she drove away all her trepidation by the thought of her tall, goodlooking husband.

The next moment Hope had taken his

sister by both shoulders, and she had put her hands on his, and they had kissed each other two or three times, and he was just the same; she even recognized the old smell of tobacco. Dear little Hope! How short he seemed now! And Edith was half inclined to laugh, and half to cry. She gave some directions to the maid, not minding that Hope had got his arm round her waist—she would have minded immensely if it had been her husband—and the brother and sister went into the drawing-room together in this fashion. Of a sudden she had ceased to be a wife, and became a girl again.

"Well, Edie, how are you?" Hope repeated, with satisfaction, looking at her once more.

"How are *you*, dear?" she smiled back radiantly. "And why have you made yourself so scarce all this time?' Edith at once fell into a different tone of speech from that she had used of late.

Hope was sending one of his keen

glances round the room. "I"—then, "Got any brats yet?" he said, suddenly, turning back to his sister.

"Hope, how *can* you say such things?" Edith coloured scarlet.

"Oh! I beg pardon, I'm sure. Didn't know there was any harm in talking of children under that name. I ought to have done, of course. But, somehow, things slip out of your head!" He had his queer smile that Edith remembered so well. But his face beamed once more as he said, "Come, I say, you *are* looking well. How's hubbie? I ought to have asked after him—"

"Hubbie! As if—" Edith began indignantly.

"Oh! I didn't mean to say that you called him 'hubbie.' But to tell you the truth, at that moment I'd forgotten his name—Ber—Bert."

"Bernard."

"Bernard. Yes, I'd got it. Do you call him Bernard now, or Bernie, or what?"

"Berrie sometimes," Edith said, smiling, and a soft look coming into her eyes, which Hope, who saw everything, did not miss.

"Berrie. Oh! that's it—is it? Berry pretty, I'm sure. *He's* all right; that's clear. You're looking first-rate. How's my reverend father and the mother person?"

"Oh, Hope!" Edith said, in a voice half-anxious, half-expostulatory. "You *must* go down to Battersby this time."

"Oh, I'm going. Don't frighten yourself!". He was standing one pace away from her now, with his hands in his pockets. "I'm the prodigal son, if you like. I should certainly have spent my portion, if I'd ever had one to spend. But I tell you," he went on, screwing up his eyes, "I've been doing rather well lately. I've got my pockets full of chinks." (He rattled his money as he said this.) "And last year I had almost to pawn my shirt."

"No? How dreadful! Why, we heard that you had been so praised last year in—"

"Fact—oh, well—I'd things to pay off," he answered, rather evasively. "That was why I couldn't come to your wedding. . . I was worse the year before though," he went on.

"Poor dear! Were you really? Why didn't you ask father for some money? He would have sent you some, I'm sure. Why didn't you tell me, Hope dear?"

"Oh, don't mind me," and again he put his hand on his sister's shoulder, "I like it. I'm going to have some fun now I'm over here. I've not been in London with any money in my pocket for I don't know how long. I shall *faire la noce*, as we say, if you know what that means. Only you don't," he added, half to himself.

"Not exactly. Go to a wedding, does it mean? Who is going to be married?"

"I am—some of these days."

"No, not *really*, Hope. You never—I do hope—" Edith *could* not look anything but uneasy. The more satisfactory a sister's marriage, the less, very often, does she anticipate a like satisfaction from the marriage of her brother.

Hope laughed a little grimly. "No, you idiot! I only said some of these days. You do *not* hope, you know that well enough; you fear. However, Hope does you."

"Hope, I wish you'd be sensible. Seriously, are you thinking of getting married?"

"I've put you in a blue funk," Hope chuckled. "No, seriously I'm not."

"You *will* tell me first, if you ever do think of that, won't you, Hope?"

"Oh, damn it!" he shook himself free from the hand Edith had placed on his coat-lappet. "Now you've got that *idée fixe* that I'm going to be married, nothing on earth will ever drive it out of your head again. I'm *not*, I'm NOT, I'm NOT. What shall I swear by? I say,"

he said, suddenly quieting down, "I'll take you and Bertram, Bernard, Berrie, to a theatre to-morrow night."

"Oh, Hope! I hope you won't mind very much. We've got a few people coming to dine here to-morrow night."

"What! you've got biled gents with plastered shirt-fronts, nude female busts, and all that show, as we say over there."

"Hope, you really are very coarse," said Edith, changing her tone.

"So will your dinner be course, and many of 'em. Well, if you insist on expecting me to sit down with biled Christians of that sort, I should like to know how you're going to rig me out?"

"But haven't you got any dress clothes?" Edith said, in a tone almost of horror.

"I believe I have, rotting somewhere in a cupboard in my studio. But I can't get them over by to-morrow night. Well, Berrie must lend me a suit of clothes; that's all about it."

"Oh, Hope! my husband's twice as

big as you are. What are we to do? We heard that you were getting to be quite a distinguished man in Paris."

"And of course you thought the measure of distinction is the number of times one puts on one's dress clothes. How rich! That's English all over." He threw back his head, and gave a short laugh.

There was a slam of the front door. "Oh! there's Berrie," she cried, her whole face changing, and she went to the door. "Hope's come," she called out; and anon her tall husband entered. He was dark and close-shaven, after the manner of barristers, and had a flexible mouth, which looked good-humoured but not too energetic. He was over six feet in height, but not proportionately strong, and was not given to much physical exercise—"soft," as his brother Frank called him, using the word in the stable—not the schoolboy—sense.

When the two men had shaken hands, Edith, a little nervously, returned to the difficulty about the next day's dinner.

"Berrie, it's a great pity, Hope hasn't brought his dress clothes with him. What shall we do?"

"Don't you bother about me; I shall manage somehow," Hope said, standing very square with his hands in his jacket pockets. "Change clothes with a waiter, if you have any waiters, and send him home to get another suit. But what induced you," he went on, looking at both his interlocutors, "to turn a lot of whited sepulchres on to me? What will the beggars talk about? Who are they? Of course I shan't know any of them."

Bernard smiled, and began to think to himself that he should like this brother-in-law of his.

"Oh, yes," said Edith; "I forgot to tell you; Carry and Willie are coming."

"Carry! You mean the Speilbys? Carry—she's a dear. I saw her four years ago when I was at Battersby the last time. And Willie, let me see—"

"You must remember Willie Speilby.

Why it was him you hurt with a spade at All-Syston," said Edith.

"Of course, I *remember* him well enough. I've seen him long since then —at Uncle Robert's funeral, *par exemple*. . . . . By Jove, what a row I got into for that!" he went on reflecting, "and, golly, how it did bleed! I was awfully delighted with myself at first, I remember; and then I got in a funk when it went on bleeding. I stuck him under the pump, and pumped till it stopped. Rather sharp for a little beggar of twelve or thirteen. I don't suppose he was more than ten. He got nearly suffocated while I was pumping. However, he took it all right—didn't make any row or anything, as far as I know. It was Nelson who told."

"You wouldn't find it so easy to cut his head open now," said Bernard. "He's a head taller than you are."

"No, of course," Hope nodded back. "I've seen him since then. . . . How we used to hate those Speilbys when we

were kids, didn't we, Polly?" he went on, pretty well ignoring his brother-in-law, who heard this *sobriquet* of his wife for the first time. "They were always bragging about the sea, and their rowing and fishing; don't you remember? Bob was such a strong beggar, you hadn't a chance with him. Do you remember how we thrashed him with nettles once, when he had slipped down into a ditch outside Parker's ten-acre, and then cut off? By Jove, I was in a funk till we got indoors."

These last remarks were almost of the nature of a soliloquy, for Bernard Harwood had gone out of the room, and Edith had followed him rather anxiously with her eyes, not being sure of the impression which her brother was producing.

"At any rate," she reflected, "Hope isn't a nobody."

Her brother had made last year a sudden leap into something like fame as an illustrator in black and white. For years he had struggled on as only art

students in Paris know how to struggle on, always with a big canvas on hand, and always ready to pick up little jobs of work to put bread into his mouth. The big canvases scarcely ever found their way into an exhibition. But suddenly some drawings which he had sent to the Black and White had attracted notice. A large Parisian publisher, who was undertaking a new enterprise in illustrated novels, was struck by them. The result was more than a *succès d'estime* for Hope in the French artistic world. His name was already known in America, and would, in the normal course of things, not require more than six years to become familiar to Englishmen. Even now his relations were beginning to appreciate the fact that he might bring them credit, after all.

CHAPTER X.

It was no dinner-party. Perhaps at the bottom of her heart Edith was not very anxious to introduce her two cousins to any large circle of her acquaintance. She and the good-natured Carry were on the best of terms; but they were terms which carried on the cousinship a little *sub rosâ*, Carry's frocks not being so attractive as her character. Fortunately, she was very seldom in town. She had paid Edith one visit since the latter's marriage, and now she had been staying for three weeks or a month with her brother. This visit had forced Willie more under Edith's notice than hitherto. It cannot be said that either had exactly avoided the other. But still a bank clerk—nobody could be expected to rush

forward to receive a bank clerk. Willie on his part had no leanings towards society in those days. Many women had touched his heart or his imagination; but they were not girls whom "one met" in society, or indeed in any part of this world of sense, for their names were Portia, and Rosalind, and Britomart, and Ethel Newcome, and Constance (Norbert's Constance), and I know not who else beside.

The two "Speilbys" were the first to arrive. Edith kissed Carry with so much enthusiasm that she had not time to pay much attention to her brother; but she did observe with satisfaction that Willie looked quite gentlemanly in dress clothes, though there was rather an unpleasant crease below the collar of his coat. While Willie was looking at some books in a book-slide beside him—a Tennyson, Longfellow, *I Promessi Sposi*, all in ornamental bindings—the door opened, and a short, dark, bright-eyed young man came into the room, whom, for a

moment, his cousin did not recognize on account of his moustache brushed out in the French fashion.

"Now, Edie," said the new-comer, "what do you think of my togs? Hallo, Carry, is that you? You've grown, I declare—" "Fatter," Hope was very near adding, but restrained himself. After four years, he reflected, you can hardly resume such familiar terms, even with a female cousin. "And that's Willie. How are you? It's longer since I met you, I fancy."

"I remember you well enough," said Willie, as they shook hands, "only you looked different, somehow. It's something in the way you wear your mous—"

But Hope had turned round to his sister by this time.

"I say, Polly," he said, "what a howling swell you are! I encountered a man in brown livery and plated buttons. They don't supply his semblables at the greengrocer's, do they?" (He used the word *semblables* as if it were a

recognized integer of the English vocabulary.)

"Why, you must have seen him before," Edith said. "He opened the door for you yesterday. Don't you know—"

"Never set eyes on him before, that I'll swear."

"Then he must have gone out. Oh, yes! I said he might go to see the Tower. But you certainly have seen him before. It's James, from the Rectory."

"No! Is it?" said Hope. "Didn't recognize him in the least. I thought it was odd his calling me 'Mr. Hope.' But James was a new invention at Battersby when I was there last."

"He's going back to-morrow"—and as she said this, Edith turned to take Carry into the conversation—"to be ready for my father and mother when they get back from Strathfeffer. He's only here for a sort of holiday."

"Oh, I see, doing the sights," Hope said.

"Those flights upon the banks of Thames,
That did so take Eliza and our James.

Who says that?" he went on, turning to Willie.

"I — I — forget," Willie stammered, while he smiled.

"Ben Jonson, I believe," Hope said, a touch of pedagogy in his manner, which had a quaint far-off flavour of the Rector of Battersby. "You used to be the poet of the family. I thought you would remember all those Johnnies."

Willie felt slightly snubbed, but not disagreeably so. He had come prepared to look upon his cousin as a person of coming distinction; for the Rector of Battersby had made much of his son's success, now that it was an undoubted fact. Willie, therefore, was a good deal impressed by this ready-witted, bright-eyed young man, whose self-confidence contrasted with the nervousness of which he himself was conscious at that moment. He could not fit this Hope on to the one he remembered best, the Hope whom Bob and he had made sea-sick and generally bullied in the old days.

Willie, who had scarcely gone into any sort of London society, and even as a boy at home had always been shy at "parties," was at that moment too nervous to recollect anything very clearly. Edith herself was visibly rather nervous; only Carry remained placid. Somehow, Willie had a sort of divination of what Edith was thinking about him and about Hope too, in relationship to her husband; and, though he would not have owned it to himself, he had a sort of mental clinging to Hope, like that which an indifferent swimmer feels in having a stronger and more self-confident one at his side.

Bernard Harwood came into the room and shook hands with every one. At the same moment Willie heard a knock and a ring, and his heart-strings tightened, as yours tighten when the dentist's servant singles you out from a roomful of people with a slight beckoning of his or her head, and a low "You, sir."

"You haven't told me how my clothes

look," he heard Hope saying to Edith, so as to take in her husband also. "Five shillings for the night, and two pounds deposit," Hope added, turning towards Willie.

Edith gave a nervous little laugh, and twisted her pocket-handkerchief. She felt a thousand miles away from herself of yesterday afternoon in that same room, and she glanced up half timidly at her husband.

"Turn round," said the latter.

Hope spread out his arms like a wax figure, and slowly revolved upon his axis.

Harwood looked delighted.

"Take care!" Edith cried, in a terrified voice, for at that moment steps were heard on the stairs, and the next James came to the door and announced Colonel and Miss Kirkwhite. Before these had done shaking hands with the host and hostess two other guests were announced, and Willie found himself relegated to a corner, whence he watched as a novice the doings of the different people who

were grouping themselves in the drawing-room. He noticed how, contrary to his preconceived ideas, the different orders of people distributed themselves as their sympathies and interests would naturally teach them to do. Three of the black coats were engaged in a discussion on the hearth-rug ; Edith was talking to a fat and imposing lady who had been announced as Mrs. Tremaine ; and the only two unmarried girls beside Carry had retired together into a corner under a moderator lamp, where Willie could watch the hands of one of them that appeared to be picking her fan to pieces. The only voice that came to him distinctly was that of Hope saying to Carry,—

"No ! You don't mean to say so ! How rum ! And is the old lady still alive, old Mrs.—"

Then there was a movement, a sort of general dispersal of the groups, and a minute after Edith had taken Willie across the room to introduce him to one

of the young ladies beside the moderator lamp. Willie's shyness allowed him to see no more than that his partner was clad in some soft green material, and that her hair was bright, shading towards golden. She stood up—he offered her his arm. People, he vaguely saw, were moving out of the room.

"What shall I say?" said Willie Lancoft to himself. "Shall I ask her if she lives in London? No; that sounds absurd. If she likes London best, or the country? No; that will never do. If I'd only been to a theatre or something of that sort lately! But it's ridiculous to ask her if she's been to something which I've not been to myself. It's the same if I ask her whether she's been abroad this year, or is going, as I've never been abroad myself. How stupid I am! Carry and I did go to something only the other night, and I cannot for the life of me recollect what it was. And here we are at the top of the stairs and I've not said a word!"

At that moment he heard Hope's voice behind him,—

"Stop; you'll get on better if I come to the other side," Hope said; he had in fact given his left arm to his partner instead of his right. "These stairs are rather narrow. I once saw an old lady roll down two flights of stone stairs from the top to the bottom, and she wasn't hurt in the least. The first thing she said when they picked her up was—"

But what it was Willie never heard, nor what Hope's partner replied.

"She was an old lady and very fat," his cousin's voice went on, "and she rolled down like a ball. Imagine! two flights!"

"How did she get from one flight to the other?" Willie could not help asking over his shoulder.

"Rolled, I suppose," Hope answered, without any *gêne*, speaking away from his partner. "Let me see; how it was? When I say two flights, I mean there was a landing in the middle—"

"What was that?" asked Willie's partner.

Willie explained. "I suppose that was in Paris," he added, "as my cousin lives there." At any rate I've said something, he thought.

"Is that Mrs. Harwood's brother?" said the girl beside him. "He wasn't at the wedding, was he?"

"No." (How stupid only to say "No;" but there again Hope's voice came upon his ear.)

"There was a man I knew, an Irish chap, when—when he was a little fresh you know—would seat himself in a chair, catch hold of it, and roll downstairs backwards from top to bottom, sticking to the chair all the time, and never hurt himself in the least."

"Do you mean that he was tipsy?" said the lady in a shocked voice.

"Oh, well, we won't say that . . ." and Hope's voice was lost again.

Willie was conscious that his partner had said something, but that he had

quite lost what it was. "Y—yes," he stammered, hoping that the answer might fit the question.

"Oh, live there;" again he caught Hope's voice. "Now, let me see. Where have we got to go? Edith told me opposite the fire. There, I think that will about see us."

"Edith did tell me where I was to sit," Willie reflected, "but I'm sure I forget where it was."

And suddenly he found that he and the girl he had taken down were the only people standing up in the room.

"I think it must be that side," she said. And he saw that Edith was making signs to him, and that her face was rather flushed, and that James was holding back two chairs.

He found himself opposite his cousin. He was glad of that; for somehow he knew that, if he were near, he should inevitably go on listening all through dinner to what Hope was saying.

"It was such a pretty wedding," his

partner went on, continuing a remark which to Willie's confused mind seemed to have been made half an hour ago.

And then she nodded across the table.

"Ah! there is one of the bridesmaids," she said.

"That? Oh! that's my sister."

"Do you know, I thought very likely she might be. I see a likeness between you," and she looked at Willie with wide, innocent, pale blue eyes. "But you weren't at the wedding either. Fancy neither Edith's brother nor her cousin being there. How horrid of you!"

"I couldn't get away, or else I would have come," said Willie.

"It was one of the prettiest weddings I was ever at," said Miss Kirkwhite. "I suppose I ought not to say so, though, because I was one of the bridesmaids. Your sister and I were so glad that the dresses were blue and white and not straw-colour and white which was what was settled at first, because you see blue

and white suits us very well. I like a country wedding, don't you?"

"I don't think I ever went to a wedding in my life."

"No! Really! I expect you're very *farouche*, aren't you? Your sister said you were very, very clever." (As a matter of fact she was confusing Willie and Hope when she said this.) "I expect you write books or something, don't you?"

"No, indeed, I don't."

But Willie blushed with pleasure at the idea of being supposed capable of writing "books."

"Almost everybody does write books nowadays though, don't they? I've got an uncle who writes books. He's tremendously fond of travelling, and he always seems to have such funny adventures, and meets such droll waiters and people at the hotels he goes to. Some people seem to be so much luckier than others: I'm sure those funny things never happen to me. I'm sure you'd like to know my uncle. One of his books was

called *Diligentia docet.* That was the name of the first story. That was about a priest and an Englishman. *Diligentia* means a 'diligence,' doesn't it? I don't quite remember the story, but I know it was very funny. Are you fond of reading?"

"Yes, *very*," said Willie, with conviction.

"So am I; I'm devoted to it. But I expect you'd despise the sort of books I read. I read a great deal of poetry and novels."

"Oh, no, not poetry. It's the highest kind of literature there is."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say that. But lots of people say quite different, don't they—that one ought to read science or history or—"

"Nobody says that who understands what poetry really is. Nobody can pretend that people's bodies are more interesting than their minds. And science gives you one and poetry the other."

Willie spoke rather from recollection than conviction. He had heard Mr.

Sloane-Jarvis speak in this way once when he was in discussion with the science master at Rugby. But for his own part he could never have put into words what his feelings were on the subject.

"I'm so glad to hear you say that," said Alice Kirkwhite again, rather wondering what there was to speak so energetically about in a matter of taste, but seizing hold upon the adumbration of a moral idea. "Of course no one would say that the body really was more important than the soul. But I suppose materialists do say that, too, don't they? It's very dreadful how much we do think of our bodies nowadays," she added.

"In some ways, but not in every way," Willie said. "Look how many more people read than used to do, and good writers, like Ruskin for instance—quite poor people, I mean."

"But I'm afraid they read a great deal of harm, too," said Miss Kirkwhite, in a grave voice. "I think it's dreadful some

of the atheistical books which are written now, and how they are sold everywhere."

"Y—yes," said Willie hesitatingly, for his own beliefs had, like most people's, been, as the phrase is, "disturbed" during the last five years.

"Still, all the same," his partner went on, "what is true must always remain true. That's what papa says, and it's a great comfort to think of that, isn't it?"

And this time there was a note of sincerity in her voice which was really attractive.

Not that to Willie Lancroft her voice had ever been unattractive. He had forgotten about the other people in the room. He helped himself to dishes and ate what was in his plate, drank what was in his glasses, mechanically. Now that he had gained courage to look at his partner, he thought how beautifully her neck rose out of its cloud-like setting of soft sea green, how shell-like and delicate was her ear: and then the golden-brown hair above that! It can hardly be

said that he took the face in as a whole. A subtle scent pervaded his whole being, and a hubbub of voices was round him. All that was happening was semi-miraculous, half-divine. He felt suddenly endowed with a perfect faith in goodness and its ultimate triumph, and was trying to translate the feeling into words.

But Miss Kirkwhite's neighbour on the other side, a young barrister, Mr. Prothero, had asked her a question and she was replying to that.

"No. It's a great disappointment to us. But it's such a good appointment that Harry felt he couldn't refuse; papa thought the same. He'll be in command of a native regiment, with the rank of colonel out there . . . Yes, I have another brother, Havelock. He's at Shorncliff. That's very nice for us, isn't it? . . ."

Presently Miss Kirkwhite turned back to her partner.

"Are you very fond of travelling abroad?" she said to Willie.

"I've never been abroad in my life."

"Really! I and my father have travelled a great deal since—since my mother died" (and this last sentence had like one of her previous ones a refreshing touch of natural humanity about it). "I think what I like best is just the setting out. Are you a good sailor? But of course you can't tell if you've never travelled."

"I think I should be," said Willie. "I've lived near the sea all my life, and never been sea-sick in boating or anything."

"Oh, if you've always lived near the sea, I dare say you would not want to travel. I was just going to say that I think the nicest part of going abroad is the beginning, when you first come down to the sea."

"Oh, of course, I know that. It's the most delightful thing in the world, the first time you smell the sea, especially when you've been shut up in London for months. It's indescribable." He stopped,

filled with the multitudinous sensations which the subject called up.

"We used to live near the sea some years ago, when papa was stationed at Aberdeen."

"It's a thing you never forget, really living by the sea with the sound always in your ears. Nothing else makes up for it, I think. . . And the flight of the sea-gulls. . . Sometimes being by the sea makes you wish to travel, and see what's on the other side. But I think more often it doesn't. It's pleasanter to think that it stretches out to the borders of the world. . . ."

"But then most people have studied geography, I'm afraid, and know that it doesn't."

"Yes, that's the worst of it. It's like what you were saying just now; that people may know too much. It's like—it's like what Wordsworth says, you know, about—about the Triton."

"No I am afraid I don't know. Tell me."

"Don't you know? It's in that sonnet, which begins"—Willie knew the sonnet by heart in ordinary circumstances, but his mind was a little confused. "Well the part I mean is where he says he'd rather be ignorant — than — than — materialistic you know—that sort of thing—

> Great God, I'd rather rather be
> A pagan suckled in a creed out-worn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have—have—glimpses that would make me less
> forlorn.

And then comes in the bit, about

> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn."

These last lines he gave with feeling. But Miss Kirkwhite did not in the least know who were Proteus and Old Triton.

"I can see you're very fond of poetry," she said. And, as she could think of no further observation to make at the moment, the conversation came to a pause.

Then suddenly Hope's voice broke upon Willie's ear.

"Well, you never told me whether Lavinia was married or not?"

Hope was deep in conversation with Edith, who sat upon his left hand, and had turned without much ceremony away from his partner. How curiously different, how commonplace all this must be to Hope. And Willie looked at the girl his cousin had taken down to dinner, Miss Tremaine, a "girl," rather by courtesy.

And then two lines of Keats came into his head.

> Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
> Fled is that music—Do I wake or sleep?

. . . . . .

A feeling of exaltation and of unreality remained with Willie after the ladies had gone, and his cousin came and sat by him. It was as if there were something uncanny about Hope; and if Willie had analyzed his sensations he would have felt that Hope was some mesmerist who had called up the unreal scene on which his

eyes now rested. Yet there it was before him ; and it did not change : the candles were burning on the table, Harwood was peeling a pear, and talking to two gentlemen, one of whom sat sideways on his chair and rested his elbow on the table-cloth as he chose a cigarette. . . .

" It's the northern counties I'm afraid of," Harwood was saying.

" Yes that's it," said the cigarette-smoker, and he leaned back in his chair with that sense of satisfaction, which men always feel in discussing grave political questions, which they secretly know will not leave them a penny richer or poorer whichever way they are decided.

. . . . . .

Alice Kirkwhite, in a less degree, felt this had been an evening out of the common ; and she took the opportunity after dinner of getting into a friendly talk with Carry Lancroft. On the occasion of the wedding, when she had met Carry for the first and last time, the two brides-

maids had shared a bedroom between them.

Edith was talking to Mrs. and Miss Tremaine.

"Oh, yes," Carry heard the mother say in her full patronizing voice, "Colonel Kirkwhite and I are quite old friends. He and my brother Charlie knew each other in Africa, when the Inniskillings were out there in '81." She spoke as if everybody must know who her brother Charlie was.

And later on at the end of the evening, when Mrs. and Miss Tremaine had shaken hands with the host and hostess, and Colonel Kirkwhite had just said, "Well I think we must be going too," she turned to him with a shade more cordiality and said,—

"How are you going home? Because if you and your daughter don't mind squeezing into our little carriage, we could drop you on your way."

"Thank you, thank you very much," said Colonel Kirkwhite. "But Earl's Court Road, you know—"

"Well we're in Collingwood Road. It's not a hundred yards out of the way, at any rate. If you're not afraid of the squeeze."

Mr. Prothero, the barrister, had already gone off; and on the other side of the hearthrug, stood Hope and Carry and Willie.

"All right; I'll walk to Queen's Road Station with you," Hope was saying.

What a contrast! Edith was keenly sensible of it; and she could not help divining too that Hope had offended Miss Tremaine. What a thousand miles she felt from herself in the same room only the day before, when she had delighted in picking up her old slang words and sharing her reminiscences with her brother.

. . . . .

"Quite a family party apparently," Miss Tremaine said with a touch of disdain, when the four had squeezed themselves into Mrs. Tremaine's brougham. "Could you make out who

they all were? They were all relations of Mrs. Harwood's, I gather." She wound her skirts more carefully about her knees as she spoke.

"Yes, Edith Harwood told me," her mother said; "they were her brother and two of her cousins."

"A fine-looking fellow one of those young men," said Colonel Kirkwhite.

"Well I should say the one who took me down—was that the brother or the cousin?—was decidedly second-rate," said Miss Tremaine. "I don't know how you got on with the other one, he seemed rather heavy in hand."

"Yes, he was very," answered Alice Kirkwhite, who was apt to take her opinions from other people. "I like his sister, though," she added.

. . . . .

"Well," said Bernard Harwood, coming back into the drawing-room. "That's over, at any rate. Hope's walking on with your cousins." He went up to his wife, and put both his arms round her.

Edith leant her flushed cheek against his white shirt-front. After all, what did it matter? she thought. What did anything matter to her who was married and had got Berrie for a husband? Probably, too, he had never noticed anything. Men were so marvellously unobservant. She could feel the beats of his heart as her head nestled against him. How delicious to think that that heart was hers! The tears of vexation which had been at the back of her eyes turned into tears of a more human kind, and a sense of something like remorse and shame came into her breast. She put her arms round her husband's neck, and drew his lips down to hers.

"You darling," he said, when he had kissed her, for he was still very much in love with his wife. And then, seeing the tears on her eyelashes, "But you're tired. Get off to bed with you. I daresay Hope will want to have a smoke when he comes in. But I shan't be long."

"How impossible it is for a man to understand the thoughts of a woman," Edith said to herself.

. . . . .

Hope on his side made his reflections as he walked home from the station. "Decidedly," he said to himself, "I have done right to settle not to stay here. I'm not wanted. Well; of course I can take care of myself well enough. I always meant to do that; everybody has a right to go their own way." (This was the nearest point he got to the admission that it was he who had deserted Edith, and not Edith him.) "Still, I'm a pretty lonely chap now, that's clear."

Hope had, in fact, always looked forward to the time of his coming back in triumph, and carrying Edith off with him. That is to say, he had always kept that possibility at the back of his thoughts. Now he imagined that he had fully intended to set up housekeeping with her in Paris.

His thoughts turned for a moment to a certain Thyrza Winnstay, an art student, whose acquaintance he had lately made in the French capital. And he thought, too, of the conversation with Edith the day before, and smiled a little sourly to himself. For under Hope's air of bonhomie and Bohemianism there was an observation sometimes preternaturally keen, and the possibility, at any rate, of feelings preternaturally strong.

CHAPTER XI.

The next morning Carry, coming down to breakfast, found her brother striding backwards and forwards in the little room, with his finger in a book out of the bookshelf, repeating something or other, she could not catch the words.

He stopped short and blushed as soon as he saw her.

"Were you making some poetry?" said Carry, in her friendly way, as she kissed her brother.

"N—no, I was only repeating some Greek verses," her brother answered with the stammer which often came on him. He laid the book open on the table.

And, as Carry did not understand Greek, there was no danger of her finding out that these verses were in praise

of Love; were, in fact, those of a certain very famous chorus from the Antigone, which—who knows how many thousands, of young men?—have at one time of their lives repeated to themselves when they were, or thought themselves, in love.

"I did tell you, didn't I?" said Carry, in the midst of other talk, "that Miss Kirkwhite asked me to go and see her? Wasn't it nice of her? I dare say, though, it was your *beaux yeux* that had most to do with it."

Willie changed the subject, and they discussed other details of the dinner and of the Harwood's household which they had not exhausted the night before. . . .

For once in his life Willie was glad to hurry off to the bank. He rushed along the street, not seeing where he went; and all the time he was muttering that chorus over to himself, rolling the heavenly-soft lines over his tongue,—

ὅς ἐν μαλακαῖς παρειαῖς
νεάνιδος ἐννυχεύεις.

Was it really on his account that Alice Kirkwhite had been so friendly to Carry? He was ready enough to believe that it was. That he was in love with her he never for a moment questioned. What a trememdous, awful, entrancing moment! the supreme event of his life, the one he had been always waiting for, the divine frenzy indeed!

. . . ὃ δ' ἔχων μέμηνεν.

"Good God, sir! I wish you'd look where you are going."

Out of the rosy mist came this voice. Willie was hardly less amazed than would an ancient Greek have been, if from the city of the Purple Crown he had been by a miracle transplanted into the middle of our London of the nineteenth century.

"I—I— b—beg your pardon, I'm sure."

"Well, I should think you've reason to," grumbled the other, whom Willie's great weight had all but precipitated through a shop window.

. . . . .

How dreary, how impossible seemed this work he had to do—and he a poet! How had he ever endured it so long? But, ah! how was he ever to escape from it? How was he ever to get rich enough to—to marry? And a reaction began at once to set in, followed by another reaction against itself; and a dozen times that day Willie went through the agonies of hope and of despair.

One thing he did not notice, that Alice Kirkwhite's face was really quite indistinct to him—a mere mist of golden brown hair and of softly-tinted cheek. Of what she had said, too, he had no clear recollection. It was rather that his whole being was penetrated with the essence of the eternal feminine.

. . . . .

All that day he seemed to be a new person. Numberless reminiscences of past feelings rose up and floated round him. How terrible those early years at the bank had been! How he had shrunk from contact with many, most of his

brother clerks, their vulgarities, their impurities!

In the afternoon, when he left the bank, hope was in the ascendant; and, as he strode westwards for a long stretching walk, it was Montrose's lines that Willie was repeating,—

> "I'll make thee glorious by my pen,
> And famous by my sword."

Looking up, his mind still far from earth, Willie Lancroft was yet arrested by a face which he knew carried strangely pleasurable associations with it.

"Ah, Lancroft, isn't it?" said the strangely familiar voice. Willie saw that he was in the presence of two men, four or five years, probably, older than himself. Each wore a long frock coat, open, and showing the silk lining. Both had watch-chains stretching from pocket to pocket—a fashion then just coming in—and hats of sufficient newness without being absolutely new. Both were above the middle height, slender and gentlemanly-looking. One had a very

handsome, dark, discontented face; the other might be called fair; he looked bland and smooth. He had changed very little since Willie had seen him last; and when the latter came quite to himself it was with an odd sort of thrill that he recognized Mr. Sloane-Jarvis.

"Ah, Lancroft, isn't it?" he had been saying. "How do you do, my dear fellow. I haven't seen you for an age. My fault, I know. The truth is, I lost your address. Why didn't you write to me? Where are you staying? You must come and see me, will you? Any more poetry? Don't blush, my dear fellow; we all do it. A Rugby friend, Manby. Mr. Manby, Mr. Lancroft." Willie shook hands with the friend. On a second view, he saw that his face expressed not so much discontent as melancholy tempered by sarcasm. The faint smile which politeness required of him, did not alter his expression a hair's-breadth. "A coming literary star," Sloane-Jarvis went on, "going to cut us all out, I assure you."

"Assuming that we are *in*, in any way," put in Manby.

"Ah! Don't throw cold water on us. We believe in ourselves and our art, Lancroft and I. Perhaps that's because we've not had so much to do with it as you have. I shouldn't wonder, if Lancroft's got a big epic in his coat pocket at this moment. Upon my word, you're blushing again. Well, you must come and read it to me. You'll give me your address, won't you? Stop a minute, I'll write it down—15, New Ormond Street—Let me see, where's that?"

"Well, it's near Great James Street, if you know where that is—or Red Lion Street—do you know that?" Willie said, doing his best to answer with assurance.

"Oh, yes, I think I know. Not far from Lincoln's Inn, isn't it? What are you doing? Well, you must come and dine with me some day, will you? or lunch, perhaps lunch would suit you better. I dine out a good deal."

"The only thing is, I'm at work all day till five or six."

"Not still in that office?" ("Bank," put in Willie.) "No? Well; we must fix a day, and talk it over. I've not been to Rugby since I don't know when. I'll write; perhaps that will be the best plan. Good-bye."

Willie shook hands with the two friends and passed up the street, quickening his pace.

Thus, in a moment, quite unexpectedly, had taken place the meeting which at one time of his life, Willie Lancroft had thought of and looked forward to almost every day, much as a girl looks forward to the return of a lover, who is not only to bring the delights of his presence, but to rescue her from the monotonous life which she is condemned to lead. Now: well now it seemed—Willie had not decided what it seemed like. He had reached the top of St. James' Street, when a hansom stopped by the pavement, just in front of him, and Mr. Sloane-Jarvis'

head again appeared, waving to him to stop.

"What a pace you walk!" Sloane-Jarvis said, when he had rejoined his old pupil. "I saw you turn the corner, but I couldn't catch you up. Manby went into the club, and I thought, now I had succeeded in running you to earth, I must not let you go again so soon, or you'll be escaping me altogether."

He was amazingly cordial. Willie recognized what joy he used to anticipate from just such a meeting and such a reception as this; and he partly succeeded in feeling the pleasure which he had always expected to feel.

"Now tell me about yourself," the other went on, just in that old way that used to thrill his disciple—a manner peculiarly his, in which the pedagogue, the elder brother, the friend, seemed nicely blended. "I don't like to think of you still in that office. I hope you haven't given up the idea of literature. That would never do."

Willie felt the penetration of this genial warmth; and gradually by fragments he began to open his heart to his ancient mentor in the way he had been used to do while he was still a boy. Of course it was of his literary hopes and plans that he spoke first. But he let it be divined that he had a good deal on his mind. . .

"Let's turn in here," said Sloane-Jarvis, as they came to the edge of the Green Park. He, on his side, felt no small degree of pleasure in thinking what a lasting impression he had made on this young man, who generally gave to the more intelligent people with whom he came in contact an impression of strength, mental as well as physical, to which, it must be owned, Willie's conduct, up to the present, lent small support. But as Sloane-Jarvis took in this impression from his companion, he noticed also the bad sit of his coat, the oldness of his hat. Therefore he said, "Let's turn in here and sit down;" and they went and sat down on one of the benches in the Green

Park, out of notice of the crowd of Piccadilly. "Well, I tell you what," said the late master, when the talk had lasted nearly an hour; "you must fix some morning to come and breakfast with me; some Sunday morning, I suppose would suit you best. Next Sunday —no—let's say Sunday week, to make sure. We'll go into the thing thoroughly. You must bring me what you've done, and we'll talk it over. I daresay I could advise."

"I should think you could," said Willie, enthusiastically, with an odd unconscious return to his schoolboy manner. The tone in which he spoke was more flattering than a long protestation.

That very night he would unlock his manuscript books, and look through them all again. How was it that this last year he had written nothing, nothing?

. . . . .

The following day, when Willie got home, he was greeted by Carry—

"Oh, Willie! Hope's sent a telegram.

He's got three stalls for the theatre, and he's coming to dine here—isn't it nice of him?—and take us. I've told Mrs. Bennett, and I've dressed, you see. I thought I'd better, hadn't I? I suppose you will, too, won't you?"

. . . . .

Mrs. Bennett and Lavinia had both put on clean caps to welcome Hope. The old lady smiled and mumbled; Lavinia looked condescendingly pleased. It was only the latter who kept any recollection of the "trifle of rent" that had been owing when Hope left them. Hope, on his side, was in that mood of almost excessive friendliness which he sometimes displayed towards his social inferiors. There was a touch of affectation in it. It implied a snub to his equals.

To Carry and Willie he talked with his back to the chimney-piece.

"I've got three stalls," he said, "but I wasn't going to put on war-paint. You may do what you like. I did last night, to go with Edith and 'Berrie'" (he

made a slight wry face at that name). "But I saw a lot of Johnnies without."

"We don't go in for anything so swell as stalls," said Willie.

"Ah, well! you see I'm in cash just now. I'm not always, by any means."

"Shan't you be rather late getting back to Craven Hill Gardens?" said Edith.

"Oh, I'm not staying at Craven Hill now. I can't stand being tied down by other people's ways, and having all my goings out and comings in taken note of."

"Poor Edith!" Carry said. "She will be sorry." At the same moment she sent a look across to her brother, to take him to witness what an odd fellow this cousin of theirs was. Hope caught the look *au vol* as he caught most things.

"Humbug! You women always want to make sentiment out of everything. Edith's got all she wants," he said.

"But she's so very devoted to you," said Carry.

"Damn— I beg your pardon.

'Devoted!' that's just one of their words," he turned to Willie as he said this. "I suppose your sisters are *devoted* to you, aren't they?"

"I should think we *are*," said Carry.

Here dinner came in.

"You'd much better be devoted to me, Carry," Hope said, suddenly changing his tone, "as Lavinia is."

Lavinia pursed up her lips and remained impassive. Carry looked rather shocked.

"What wine will you drink?" said Willie, interposing, fortunately but not by design.

"What have you got?"

"Well, I've got some sherry and some claret," said Willie, rather doubtfully, looking into the recesses of the cupboard.

"Well, I'll begin with sherry, anyway."

"You and Edith are as thick as peas now, aren't you?" Hope went on to Carry at dinner. "Rum thing. I remember

when we were children we used to think you an awfully stuck-up lot."

"We used to hate you like anything when you were a boy, didn't we, Willie?" and Carry, as she said this, glanced involuntarily at Willie's scar.

"Well, I'm sure I paid you back," Hope, who again caught her glance, answered in a truculent way.

"What a horrid boy you were!" Carry said, with a slight shiver.

"Oh, I had an awful temper in those days; there's no doubt about it," and he laughed rather disagreeably.

"I say, you never turned up at Edith's wedding, did you?" Willie said.

"You'd know if you'd been there," Hope replied, smiling.

"Oh, I could not get away from the bank; Battersby's such an infernal long way off from town."

"I was a good sight farther off. I was in America," said Hope. This was not precisely the reason he had given to Edith.

"You were in America!" exclaimed Willie.

"I never heard of that now," said Carry. "What did you go there for?"

"Devilish—very lucky for me I did go. They've taken me on at Shairper's, and I'm engaged to do a book on the architectural towns of France. I don't know a cent now about architecture or anything of that sort, but the job's such a good one I'm not going to let it slide."

"You're going to write about—what sort of architecture?" said Willie.

"Oh, I'm not going to do the writing. They'll get some Johnny to do that."

"Then what do you do?" said Carry.

"Good God! The *illustrations!* Didn't you know I illustrated books? Didn't you see what *Figaro* said about my exhibition of Black-and-White?"

"Oh, I knew you were an artist, and that your pictures had been praised very much," Carry said, soothingly

Hope gave a grunt of disgust. "I'd much better stay in Paris. They think a

lot of me there," he said. And for the rest of the evening he was much less expansive. . .

"By Jove! you're a lucky chap," Willie sighed.

"I'm a plucky chap. Why, when I was twenty-one I had just two hundred pounds in the world, and that was all. There was a chap called José Lippa I knew in London. He was half Spanish, half French, and a quarter American."

"Rather difficult to be that."

"He was a quarter bigger than most beggars, that's how it was. Well, he was going over to Paris to study art—he's come to grief since—and I thought that I'd like to do the same. Mind you, I'd never been taught to draw except architectural drawing, and that's just the thing I can't do now. But I made up my mind as soon as I'd got that two hundred pounds off I'd go to Paris and sink or swim there. Don't know what I didn't live on—about a franc a day. Of course I was all for doing tremendous paintings

in the big style, such as you see in the *salon*—only you don't know anything about that—Nobody'd look at anything I did. But at last I got the chance of illustrating a story that Douchet was writing in *Les Lettres et les Arts* (if you know what that is). Well! That set me going. . . ." He stopped short suddenly, as if he had decided that his present auditory was too ignorant for details.

. . . . .

"I tell you what," said Hope, towards the end of dinner to Willie. "I'll invite you over to come and stay with me in Paris. When do you have your holidays?"

"Oh, Willie, that would be delightful for you," Carry said.

"Quite soon," Willie replied.

A very quick observer might have seen a momentary shade pass over his cousin's face; but he said—

"All the better. Let's settle it at once. I hate spending time talking over things. That's the way women do," he said, in

his domineering way, to Carry ; " talk for ever and never settle anything."

" Of course I should like to come most awfully," Willie said.

" Right then. You come. I can't exactly put you up in my *atelier;* but I'll get you a room in a hotel close by."

" But that'll cost a lot of money," said Willie.

" Oh, I'm in cash: I told you. Besides, it won't cost a lot of money. I'm not going to get you a room at the Grand or the Louvre—the hotels on the Boulevard Mont Parnasse are of quite a different sort. One never has meals at home anyway. We shall breakfast and dine at *cafés* and that sort of thing."

" Jolly. I should like that ! "

" I'll put it down. When is it to be for ? . . . Second Saturday in May. That'll do capitally. In the summer I must begin my architectural tour. . . . Well, we ought to be starting now."

CHAPTER XII.

THE appointed Sunday morning saw Willie in the best possible spirits, on his way to Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, to breakfast with his former master. The empty town was flooded with veiled sunlight. The two or three shabby figures perambulating the streets; the two or three cabmen drinking at the public-house doors were lost sight of as he travelled further west; in place of them the monotonous tramp of a policeman, now and again a maidservant in Sunday attire hurrying along to make the most of her day out; a perambulator or two with attendant nursemaid, and a guardsman at her side.

Willie took out of his pocket a letter he had received from his younger sister

a day or two before (Carry had gone back to Speilby), and read it as he walked along. The letter was full of interest; for Charlie wrote almost exclusively about Willie Lancroft.

This was not the same Charlie who had stayed with her brother in early days, and had laughed and spluttered and made verses with him, had strolled the streets at night, had sat in the pits of the theatres and enjoyed everything. Charlie had faced life on her own account, had passed examinations and proceeded High-School teacher, and she had now her "pensive citadel" (shared with a friend), whence she looked out on the chimneys and furnaces of a great iron town in the north of England. But she spent all her leisure moments in diving deep into the history of English literature, with, at the back of all, the unrecognized hope of sharing the intellectual life of her brother, and of fitting herself to be his companion and critic. Nay, in truth, this last she already was,

and it was because she had written about Willie's poetry that he was reading her letter with such interest now.

"I *do* like that one beginning 'One after another the shapes run in,'" Charlie wrote. "I should advise you to try that. It has so much go in it. Or that one is very good beginning,—

> "All night the clock with tickings slow,
> Will tick below in a darkened room.

(I like 'fight in the gloom' better than 'dance in the gloom.') I am sure either of those, or rather both of them, *ought* to be taken. And the long ode, I like that very much, especially those lines,—

> "For quick the generations come and go,
> The shadowy bearers of a shadowy yoke,

all that part, I mean. But, you know, you have read me all those before. You haven't sent me your *epic*, and you don't say how far you have got on with it. I liked what you read to me once so much. I remember you began it in two ways,

and hadn't made up your mind which you would take.

> "Across our northern seas the morning comes
> Shaking his golden plumes. . .

That was one beginning, wasn't it? And then there was one beginning about the Sun and the Titan—no, about Memnon,—

> "Titanic Memnon through the shaken air
> Proclaimed his advent.

I remember that, but not the first two lines. I wish you would send me what you have done of that, unless it would stop your going on; but perhaps it would; so don't."

Should he, Willie, read the shorter or the longer poems to-day? Willie felt, despite his reawakened belief in Mr. Sloane-Jarvis, that the interest of his paragon in him hung on rather a slender thread. He might think the smaller poems just mere magazine verse. Willie repeated to himself a verse of one of them—"The House of Plague."

"'Twixt a gust and a shower the Hours go by ;
They weep and sigh
For the Life that is gone ;
And bear away snatches of revelry,
Till the Last Hour's left alone."

Yes, that was the doubtful verse—too much of what Charlie called "go" in that. Well, he had the epic (so much as he had written of it) in his right breast-pocket, and the shorter pieces (should he try the ode?) in his left. He must leave it to the inspiration of the moment.

The muffled sound of a hansom passed him as he got near his destination ; he heard, without seeing, a boy crying the Sunday papers down a neighbouring street, and the voice echoed in the stillness. And all the while there was in his ears a rhythmical sound of unmusical bells which kept time to the verses he was repeating to himself. It was the *epic* that he was repeating now. Yes, certainly there was stuff in that. Mr. Sloane-Jarvis could not fail to recognize so much ; and what might he not be able to do, he so

good and wise—rich as he evidently was now—and no doubt influential? "Real genius," Willie said to himself, Sloane-Jarvis would say there was in it. Faults, no doubt, but "real genius," the essential thing. And with this thought Willie, now drawing near his destination, felt the tightening of the heart, the joyful thrill of nerves, which Napoleon maybe felt at the outset of one of his earlier battles, of Lodi or Arcola.

Willie knew little of West-end lodgings, and he was rather awestruck to find the door opened by an overgrown boy in buttons, who took him up to the second floor, and, after knocking at the door, showed him into Mr. Sloane-Jarvis' sitting-room. Directly he entered, the remembrance of the master's room at Rugby came upon Willie in a flood. This room was a good deal the larger; but it could not be called large. His eye was first caught by the band of pale blue Japanese silk which ran round the room. It was embroidered with tiny figures

in red and gold and green. Below the band, round three sides of the room, ran an ebonized book-shelf well filled, most of the books in good bindings. On the window side was, faintly discernible behind the backs of chairs or between the heavy curtains, a dado of dark green with metallic reflexions. In each of the windows was a low window-seat covered in three-pile embossed velvet; the curtains of the windows and of the fireplace were of the same material; a tigerskin was thrown over one of the window-seats. The carpet, he saw, did not carry out the impression of luxury which was given by the rest of the furniture—it was commonplace in pattern and rather worn. But there was a handsome Persian rug in front of Sloane-Jarvis' desk.

Meanwhile, the hobbledehoy in buttons knocked at Mr. Sloane-Jarvis' bedroom door, and the voice from behind it said,—

"Coming in a minute. Bring up breakfast."

The page brought forward a narrow table and placed it near one of the windows, opening out two leaves supported on legs. Willie watched him laying the stiff white tablecloth and setting thereon the marvellously bright spoons and forks, the butter-dish and jam-pot. He still felt the same joyful fluttering of the heart. It was as if he were assisting at some great ceremony, some great *inauguration.* And then his thoughts flew away to include Alice Kirkwhite as a partaker, not in the ceremony, but in the results.

> "I'll make thee glorious by my pen,
> And famous by my sword."

(The sword was, of course, a *façon de parler.*)

The boy had left the room. Now he came back to place two hot dishes on the table. Their covers shone in the pale sunlight so as almost to dazzle Willie's eyes.

Mr. Sloane-Jarvis, on his side, had looked forward with more interest than

he was quite aware of to this reknitting of old ties. He was by nature of an affectionate disposition. But somehow the claims of affection could never square with other claims. He had a brother who, he was obliged sorrowfully to own, was impossible in the intellectual and refined society which he frequented. What, for instance, could Manby have made of Tom Jarvis, of the Irish Constabulary? His sister's husband, too, was impossible in another sense—parsons did not go down with the *illuminati*.

Sloane-Jarvis was fairly well-off now for a bachelor. With what an uncle had left him lately, he had four hundred a year beside his fellowship at All Souls—and literature, he would have added, under the vague impression that he added materially to his income by that. But save that he had once made a selection and translation of "Plutarch's Lives" for that excellent series, *Biographies of the Ancients*, and received fifty pounds for doing so, he had hardly earned any-

thing by his pen. No doubt he was a man to be envied—well-off, cultivated to the highest point of cultivation, well-connected, "well seen" in good society. Yet, for all that, he sometimes looked back to those days when he had been obliged to earn his living, and had had little to do with society; when he had still spoken of Mr. Ruskin as his Master, and still dreamt of winning hearts and of adding sweetness and light to pedagogy. Yes, he had meant to keep his hand on some of those young fellows of the sixth. But, as a matter of fact, they had all passed out of his ken—all had disappeared, as a matter of fact, except Harbord, who was now the Honourable Julian Harbord, and a person one met in society. There was nothing of the disciple about Harbord now, but he had never been one of the most promising; a nice fellow, a thoroughly nice fellow, but not a touch of genius about him. Now, with Lancroft it was different; of all the lot he was certainly— But here Mr.

Sloane-Jarvis stopped in his reflections. He had looked rather dusty, rather shabby that day in Pall Mall. "I wonder what Manby thought of him?" Then he recalled for the first time the fact that Manby had not made one single observation about Willie Lancroft. "If he had been a genius, Manby would have found it out," Sloane-Jarvis thought to himself.

At this point, his toilette completed, he opened the door and passed into the next room.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mr. Jarvis came in in an All Souls' blazer, and Willie, with a sudden reversion to the feelings of a schoolboy, jumped up and remained standing before him.

"So good of you to come, my dear fellow," said the ex-master, touching his guest lightly on the shoulder; and once more a thrill, the old romantic schoolboy thrill, passed through Willie. "I'm awfully ashamed of being late. The fact is, Alfred never calls me on Sunday morning. For one thing, those infernal bells are sure to wake you; 'hell's bells,' I call them. Kingsley, or one of those fellows, talks about God's bells. I should like to make him listen for half-an-hour to the one that's going on now. I was thinking about Rugby as I

was dressing just now. It's delightful to think one hasn't got chapel to go to, isn't it? I suppose you generally take a lie in bed on Sunday mornings, don't you? It's an awful shame to drag you out like this."

"Oh, no!" was all that Willie could think of by way of reply.

"Now," said his host, with a brisk air, seating himself at the table, "take that chair. What will you have? This seems to be an omelette. What have you got in that dish?"

Willie peered into the gravy. "Kidneys, I fancy," he said, doubtfully.

"Kidneys *sautés*, isn't it? Well, which will you have? They wouldn't go badly together, would they? Try it. . . . No, thanks, I'll only have some of this," and he took a small piece of omelette and toyed with it with his fork.

"You ought to be hungry, you know," Mr. Sloane-Jarvis went on, "after coming out before breakfast. How long did it

take you? Did you come in a hansom? You can't get anywhere near here by train, unluckily. That's the only. . . ."

"I walked," said Willie.

"Bravo! But, of course, I remember what an athletic fellow you were. You used to be great at football. But I suppose you don't get any of that now."

"Oh, yes, we've a team at the bank. I'm captain of it. But we can only play on Saturdays," said Willie.

"Capital! Dear me, I did not know anyone in London played football. I never went in very much for athletics, as you know; but I keep up my fencing and do a little bit of gymnastics now and then. . . . So I suppose you won't be leaving town yet awhile. I shall be here till the end of July. You must let me see more of you."

Willie felt like one basking in the sunlight of the south after he has been cut off from it long enough to have half forgotten what it was like. It was partly the walk before breakfast, good

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for one of his heavy build, and the appetite he had brought with him, partly the sunshine, partly the excellence of the viands, but more than all, a return once again to Mr. Sloane-Jarvis' refined, cordial manner which made an inexpressible sense of *bien-être* steal over him. "There's not," he said to himself, "a happier man in London than I am."

And Sloane-Jarvis, looking at his beaming face, was carried back pleasantly to the Rugby days. It had been terrible, that school routine. But, then, what an enlightening influence he had been there! He remembered that he had been struck by a certain literary faculty in Lancroft. Suppose it were to be his own destiny, he thought, leaning back in his chair, not only to leave behind verse of his own that "would live"—he asked no more—but also to form a school of younger poets round him? That, he remembered, had once been a half-dream of his. No English poet had ever founded a school in the sense that the Italian painters did

so. No; not even Pope. He had had his imitators by the hundred or by the thousand. But no real poet grew from his loins in the sense that Tintoret grew spiritually from the loins of Titian. "Well, *chi sa*," he thought, and brought his eyes down to look at Willie Lancroft. Alas! he was eating large mouthfuls of bread and jam. His coat, too, how badly it sat about the shoulders. But still, what a faithful fellow he was! He might, at any rate, live to be Sloane-Jarvis' Boswell.

At last Willie's breakfast was finished and the table cleared.

"Well, now, my dear fellow," said the late master, in a manner which was really affectionate, pushing Willie into a deep velvet easy chair, "tell me all about yourself. Do you smoke? Try these." He handed Willie a silver cigarette-case with a monogram on it. "Were you going to smoke a pipe? Do, if you prefer it."

"N—no," Willie stammered a little. He had, in fact, put his hand in his

coat pocket at the words, "Do you smoke?" but drew it out empty. "I like a cigarette just as well—better, in fact. Only I can't afford to smoke cigarettes as a general rule."

This jarred a little. "At best only a Boswell," thought Sloane-Jarvis.

"Take a *petit verre* after your breakfast, will you?" he said, and with a key on his watch-chain he unlocked the plated bar which held in three cut-glass decanters in a stand. He himself was the most abstemious of men, and would never have dreamed of drinking spirits after breakfast, and he felt pretty sure that Willie would never expect to be offered them, and that it would be bad for him to accept the offer. But he would have sacrificed anything rather than omit one item from his duties as a host.

"A what? Oh, yes; I should like a very small quantity—chartreuse, I think, please."

Sloane-Jarvis filled a liqueur-glass and handed it to his guest; and with the

genial warmth a still stronger sense of well-being pervaded Willie's body and mind.

"How comfortable you are here!" he said, stretching out his legs. His appreciative glance wandered from the print of the bust of Petrarch close by on his right hand to the head of the Hermes of Olympia which looked on him from a bracket in the corner, taking in Venetian fiaschi and a Japanese sword as it passed. At the same time he gave with his right elbow a surreptitious sympathetic squeeze to his breast pocket. It should be the Epic; Sloane-Jarvis must appreciate it.

Sloane-Jarvis made a deprecating movement.

"Oh, comfortable!" he said, with a sort of scorn. "There's no use in having ugly things about you if you can get pretty ones; for the ugly things cost as much as the pretty ones."

Willie reflected on the appearance of his own room, and said nothing.

"I believe very much in what the scientific people call assimilated colouring," Jarvis went on, speaking rather to convince himself; for somehow the sight of the bright guileless-looking face opposite to him made him feel ill at ease with his conscience. "If you live among beautiful things—"

"You become beautiful yourself."

Who had said that? Willie could not believe that it was he, the moment the words had passed his lips. It was just the thing Hope might have said.

As for Mr. Sloane-Jarvis, he started, almost as if he had been struck, but collected himself immediately.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed. "Well, I suppose we should all collect *objets-d'art* if that were the result; except you, my dear fellow, whom Nature has endowed with such a—ah—splendid physique. You still go on with your football, you said," he continued, in his most superior manner.

Willie felt what a hideous mistake he had been led into.

"Oh, yes, but. . . I read that article of yours on the *Vita Nuova* in the *Nineteenth Century*," he went on, desperately. "Have you finished your translation of it yet?"

"Yes, I've finished it. But I've not quite made up my mind where to send it. McLongrays want me to give it to them."

This was not quite the literal truth. That noted firm had expressed an appreciation of "the care and scholarly character of the translation," and had then furnished the author with an estimate of the cost of production, suggesting that they might be willing to take half the expense, provided he furnished the other half.

. . . . .

Before long, Mr. Sloane-Jarvis' brow cleared again.

"Are you doing anything in literature?" he said. "Didn't you promise to read me something you'd been writing, when you came?"

"Did I?" said Willie, thinking it was

his duty to hesitate. Beside, that "something you've been writing" was not very encouraging. "Did I? Oh, well. It's not worth reading."

"That's for me to judge. Come, come, out with it. I can see that you've got something."

Willie took out his manuscript. "This, this—is the last thing I've been doing. It's only begun. I thought—of asking you—wh—whether it was any use."

"Prose or verse?" said Sloane-Jarvis. His voice had taken a rather severe pedagogic tone.

"Oh, poetry," said Willie, blankly. "Verse, I mean," he added.

"Of course," said Sloane-Jarvis, in a more genial voice. "I supposed it was poetry. What do you call it? However, that doesn't matter. Read away."

"Across our Northern seas the Morning comes,"

Willie began, and then hesitated. "But I—I've written a sort of intro-

duction," he said. "Perhaps I'd better read that first."

"Introduction." That sounded like the beginning of a sonnet. "Is it a series of sonnets?"

"Oh, n—no. It's in blank verse."

"Ah! That's rather dangerous. I never dispense with the cadence of rhyme myself. It's an instrument which has been brought to such perfection by the finer ear which we have gradually evolved, the special poetic inheritance of our day, I should say. However, I should like to hear some of it. I suppose it's an epic?"

"Yes. A sort of epic. It's meant to represent—the idea of it is— But I think I could explain it better if you wouldn't mind my reading some of it first."

"Yes. Very well. Read away! I am disposed to hear." Sloane-Jarvis smiled a little superiorly as he said this.

"Shall I begin with the introduction?"

"Yes, certainly. *Commencez par le commencement.*"

Willie then opened his manuscript and began to read. Mr. Jarvis heard—

> "Some spirit hear! For that there spirits dwell
> In caves and gentle winds, or by the fall
> Of desolate waters, and in forests old. . .

And again (he had lost a line or two)—

> . . . mist-girt meadows mild
> I still believe as men of old believed."

"Not so bad," he thought. He was paring his nails with his penknife. At that moment his attention was caught by the rather marked crease at the bottom of Willie's trousers, where he was in the habit of turning them up to keep them out of the mud—

> . . . . .
> "Yet not from love of God or man cut off,
> But only in himself awhile withdrawn—
> May with these elemental spirits live
> In con—"

His eyes had travelled higher, to Willie's knees. One leg was stretched out quite straight, and, yes—it could not be denied

—his trousers *were* very baggy about the knees. Sloane-Jarvis once more recalled his attention to hear.

"In fire-lit rooms they linger, while the brands
Fall into pattering ashes; so may now
Some one my prayer attend, my thoughts inspire."

Willie paused. Sloane-Jarvis felt compelled to say something, all the more that he had heard so little.

"Good," he said, "decidedly good, as far as it goes. You've caught a certain Miltonic ring, undoubtedly. But—but, go on; I'll criticize later."

"Of course, that's only introductory," said Willie. "It's nothing to do with what follows."

"It's an epic, you said, didn't you?"

"Well, a *sort* of epic—a sort of dramatic epic, if I may use the words. It—it's meant to be the dawning of day, and also the dawning of history that you begin with. It's supposed to be a kind of Spirit of the Earth or Spirit of Nature that speaks first."

And he began again,—

"Across our Northern seas the Morning comes,
Shaking her golden plumes. The sleeping winds
Awake and stretch their pinions. Some have lain
Pillowed on mountain snows; now hurrying down
They bend the drowsy forest trees, and rouse
The billows upon far Atlantic shores;
Where desolate Britain gazes toward the West;
And where beyond lies many a shadowy isle,
Ierne or the haunted Hebudes. . ."

And so on. Sloane-Jarvis listened. But he could not keep his thoughts from dwelling likewise on Willie's trousers; and, whenever he felt inclined to admire, those obstinate baggy knees seemed to rise up and forbid it.

"Well," said Willie, at length, "I only wanted to read a bit, just to know if you thought it worth while my going on."

"Oh, I think so decidedly," Sloane-Jarvis answered. But his tone said just the opposite. "You've got an ear, undoubtedly; and that's almost everything—of course, granting the imagination and poetic sensibility; and I never had any doubt that you possessed those.

But then there arises the question of the best medium; and I must say I don't think blank verse a good one. I suppose we most of us began by writing blank verse. But I must say that, for my part, I've quite abandoned it."

While Sloane-Jarvis was speaking, there suddenly flashed through Willie Lancroft's mind a thought or feeling of which, at the moment, he could give no account. It reminded him of a physical sensation which he had experienced when he was bilious—the sudden retreating of some object at which he was looking to an immense distance.

. . . . .

They shook hands and parted, with something of a benediction on the side of the late master. Sloane-Jarvis indeed felt, as he said to himself, almost *attendri* when Willie had gone. Some fragments of verse remained in his mind; and now that he was not distracted by the ill-made trousers, he began to think there was something in them. Well; he would see

how he could help the boy—some time; a nice boy, and such a faithful one.

And Willie, all the way home through the bright streets filled with the later congregations leaving church, was trying vainly to disentangle that sensation as of mental biliousness which had come over him so suddenly. What did it mean? It seemed to carry with it some hidden threat.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Saturday arrived of Willie's journey to Paris. His day's work finished, he started from London Bridge. Beverley came to see him off. After he had got into the train, the red hair and good-natured mouth of his friend remained imprinted on Lancroft's mind as something symbolic. For this first travel out of England was to him as a voyage of distant adventure.

Moreover, had not a wonderful series of adventures befallen him lately, even at home? That which Willie's mind dwelt on chiefly during the journey to Newhaven was the appearance in that very day's edition of the *Stoa* (that high-class literary journal) of a poem signed by no other name than "W. Lancroft." It was "The House of Plague;" not a

long poem, consisting, in fact, of only three verses. But there it actually was in print; and Willie felt a modest pleasure in leaving London just at the moment of its appearance. He did not expect to come back to the bank the same person that had left. He more than half anticipated that Mr. Tennyson or Mr. Browning would write to the editor of the *Stoa* to ask who "W. Lancroft" was. And as he travelled on his way, his fancy painted and repainted pictures of his introduction to one or other of these two great men, what they would say, what he should reply.

This beginning, this first step on the ladder, was due to the kind offices of Mr. Sloane-Jarvis, who had, after another interview, taken off one or two of Willie's shorter pieces to "an editor I know a little." Willie felt grateful; but still there was that within him that told him that, now he had his foot on the lowest step of the ladder, he should be able to climb up by his own exertions.

And climb to what prizes! At first, it must be owned, he was thinking chiefly of the terms in which Mr. Tennyson, or Mr. Browning, or Mr. Matthew Arnold would express their admiration of his verse. But we have not yet printed the poem. Let it stand here. Willie Lancroft had not, to his knowledge, read the poems of William Blake. But it may be that he had come across one somewhere without knowing the authorship or distinctly remembering now the source of his inspiration.

THE HOUSE OF PLAGUE.

One after another the Shapes run in
To the House of Sin,
To the House of Plague;
Their mouths are fixed 'tween a sneer and a grin;
But their wandering eyes are vague.

'Twixt a gust and a shower the Hours go by;
They weep and sigh
For the Life that is gone;
And bear away snatches of revelry;
Till the Last Hour's left alone.

He sees down the street, in a shadowy dance,
The Pains advance
With a noiseless tread.
The city watchmen eye them askance
Ere each hurries home to bed.

To climb to what prizes! Behind the thought of what Mr. Matthew Arnold would say to him, there was the thought of what a different person he should be when he next met Alice Kirkwhite. How soon, how miraculously soon, he had begun to fulfil the promise he had made to himself:

> I'll make thee glorious by my pen,
> And famous by my sword.

He had only seen Alice Kirkwhite once since the night of Edith's dinner. He and Carry had gone to an afternoon tea there. It was a small party, but as large as the little rooms of the Kirkwhites' flat would conveniently hold; and it cannot be said that Willie had gained much for a lover to build upon in the half-dozen words he had exchanged with his hostess. But then, as we have said, he would come back such a different man. One word of recognition and encouragement from one of the older generation of poets, and Willie felt he could do great things. His imagination dwelt so per-

sistently on this word of encouragement that he felt now almost as if it had been already uttered.

Through the night sped the train—first by stations with familiar names, recalling (with a strange sense of unreality and distance) the days when he and Charlie had explored together the country round about London. As Willie nodded now and again in his seat, the night, the whistling of the wind, an occasional splash of rain made a background out of which sometimes Beverley's good-natured face, sometimes Hope's black eyes, sometimes Alice Kirkwhite's pale blue ones looked at him, all changed, made fantastic or glorified.

He awoke with a start. They were in a station; the porters were bawling out something; the station lamps were shaking in the wind; and something in the sound and scent of the wind told Willie (who knew both sound and scent well) that they were near the sea. When he had got out and run along the platform with

the others, he passed through a door, and suddenly there opened before him an immense blackness. A few lamps were flaring and fluttering between him and it; and Willie at once divined that beneath that carpet of blackness lay the immeasurable sea.

They came to the gangway; and our traveller, in spite of his size and weight, found himself being elbowed back. Light, deft figures slipped in front of him and hurried down the sloping bridge. "First class straight on, second-class to the left," a man was bawling at the bottom of the companion. In the darkness, made visible by winking lamps, shrouded figures were hurrying, calling to each other: "Now, papa, this way," "Now, where is Albert gone?" "Where has that man taken my box?" What an unspeakable moment it was! Willie would have liked to have seized each of the shrouded figures by the arm and said: "Just imagine it! We are actually going to sail." Surely they must all feel

the same excitement and delight! As a ground-base to all the tramping of feet and calling of passengers, came the eternal puffing of the steam crane, the rattle of the chain, the voices of the sailors shouting "Haul away," "Lower, lower away," "Right." Then rattle--rattle—rattle; a moment's pause, and rattle—rattle—rattle again.

This, too, came to an end. There were cries from the bank; a bell rang; and suddenly—supreme moment of all—he felt the deep, deliberate thud of the paddle wheels.

On the jetty overhead the lamps slowly passed beside him. They were off! A lighthouse, far away to the left, moved into sight.

"That's Beechy 'Ead, that is," said the dark figure of a man to a dark figure of a woman which it was holding round the waist.

"Oh, dear! It's coming on to rain, steady. It's no use staying up 'ere," said the other.

But Willie could not make up his mind to go below yet. The splashes of rain came and went, the wind sang in his ears and in the rigging. It paused, and he could hear the jingling of plates and glasses down below. Then it rose again, and he was left alone with it and with the night, with the throbbing ship and the churning paddles.

Then in a little time the clouds lifted and the Great Bear came out nearly overhead. Willie could watch it swinging backwards and forwards between the masts. Something spoke within him and said that this was a moment of pause in his life, when he must look back and look forward.

That poem in the *Stoa* did not seem such an important achievement now. Before him was still the great work undone, that mystery of life not read; the voices of winds and floods crying to him for interpretation, and still not interpreted. Nay, farther than ever from being interpreted. What a silly trick he

had played upon himself in saying that Alice Kirkwhite was beginning to inspire him to greater achievements, when that "House of Plague" had been written a year ago. Alice! Sloane-Jarvis! Hope! Did inspiration come from any forces such as theirs? But the sea, the stars, the wind? How that wind used to howl round their old house at home! And he thought of Carry in the new small house, The Laurels, quietly knitting as she read aloud to her mother—at that moment, perhaps, after prayers—of Charlie in her little room in the smoky iron town, doing her duty, and content. He was content never, but always waiting, waiting.

"Whence shall inspiration come?

"That would do for the beginning of a poem," he said to himself. "Taken from something else though, I fancy," he added. But whence should it come? The winds? the floods? Was it not, after all, a mere trick he played upon

himself, this talk about them as Beings, about Nature? "*That's* it," he said, realizing the truth for the first time. "Everything grown mechanical—no Faith—no real Belief—All a mere trickery: all make-believe." A sudden disillusionment seemed to break upon him. Mr. Sloane-Jarvis—alas, what was he? He did not like to think. He would not think about it. But still the moaning of the wind in the rigging, the gurgle of the water, and the sense of wonder all around him, took away the sting of despair from this sudden enlightenment.

Whence shall inspiration come?

Well, there was no use waiting any longer now. He dreaded the return of that wave of questioning disillusion. He had better turn in.

All that night was marvellous, unearthly. He kept on awaking in his narrow berth (ranged along the wall of the second class saloon); and always as

he did so was the same thud—thud as of a mill-wheel, the same groaning of the wood-work, the same creak of the swinging lamp. He was moving on, he knew, through black immensity; as if he had been caught up upon the back of some aërolite and were speeding eternally through space.

And yet out of the eternity voices came to him. Were there not figures, too, from some fantastic other world, sipping hot whisky and water, clinking their spoons in their glasses? He must have known such in a previous existence.

"So my firm sent me word to buy up all the cheeses I could get at one-ten the kilo. Well, I knew well enough there was no use going to Bayer's or Justine or any of those big Neuchatel firms. I said to myself I'll just take a look. . . ."

And his eyes closed again. Creak—creak, thud—thud of the eternal world-mill. His planet sped on through more æons; and when he opened his eyes

again there were the same two fantastic beings beneath the lamp-light.

"We've been taking across large cargoes of sugar this last week."

"Ah, I daresay. They say they've had quite a drought in France. It'll do a deal. . . ."

"Whence shall inspiration come?" Willie murmured to himself. And the voice said, "Waiting to be interpreted. The sea—the sea; the multitudinous stars; the Great Bear swinging between the masts."

. . . . . .

He awoke with a start. A faint light was stealing in through the porthole. "Yes, sir; we shall be in in half an hour," a voice was saying. Where was the world-mill, the planet flying through space?

When he came on deck he saw a great bank stretched before him like to a bank of black cloud, and above it gleamed a white streak or two which, as they drew nearer and the light increased, proved to be the

tops of white cliffs; while through the bank of bitter cold mist into which they had now entered winked the harbour lights. Still more day, and the mist grew thinner, the motion of the ship slower. There passed little fishing-boats tossing on the water; they came into the harbour, and passed a red-trousered soldier who stood at the end of the jetty, and finally, with much crying and shouting, they moored and landed.

But still some touch of the haunted night was upon Willie Lancroft. He ventured out to wander by himself in the narrow streets still dark between their high houses, and stumbled over the uneven pavement as he walked. From the end of the streets which led towards the sea a white unearthly light seemed to stretch towards him. Once he heard the echo of feet as if approaching; but the echo died away without his having seen anyone. "*Pas perdus*," he said to himself, remembering for what city he was bound.

CHAPTER XV.

In the bright morning light Willie Lancroft drove through the streets of Paris to the height of Mont Parnasse, where, in the Hôtel Labassindre hard by the Gare du Mont Parnasse, Hope had taken him a room. He found a note from his cousin. Hope was busy that morning, but would meet him at the Bouillon Favel just opposite his hotel at *déjeuner*. And when Willie had made a toilet and had his second *café-au-lait*, he wandered out rather timidly among some of the nearer streets. The magic of the past night had gone, only leaving his head rather confused, as a person might be who had been under a spell; and now the scene was nothing but bright upper world daylight, made cheerful, strange,

and exciting by the sight of the blue blouses and the *sergents-de-ville*, by the harsh chanting of the street criers, and the ceaseless crackings of whips.

He came back to the door of his hotel before it was time to go to *déjeuner*.

Presently, by one at a time, two or three figures emerged and stood grouped together on the pavement before the door; some more coming down the street stopped to speak to them—figures most of them in soft felt hats and flannel shirts turned in at the collars. One had his fingers whitened with sizing or clay.

Willie caught scraps of their dialogue in English, yet almost in an unknown tongue.

"I don't care what you say. Of course it's decorative. It's meant to be decorative. But I'll be damned if anybody can give you the value of a *paysage* like Chauvis can. . . . Oh, Peronne. I tell you, Peronne. . . ."

. . . . .

"What did you think of Marcel's portrait?"

"The woman and boy? It's clever enough. It's amusing."

"C'est plus que clevèr; c'est crânement fait," said a Frenchman.

"Oui; n'est-ce pas? Avez vous remarqué. Did you notice," the other turned back to the first speaker, "how he carried on the blue and black of the dresses into the background? It's awfully amusing the way that's done;" and as he spoke he held his thumb in the air, as if he were dabbing paint upon a canvas. . .

. . . . .

"Jackson gave a punch last night, and Winnstay got most awfully. . ."

. . . . .

"He'll get his medal all right. You needn't be afraid about that. . . ."

. . . . .

"Well I'm going to dine at Favel's; come along in." And by two and three the group dispersed; many of them crossed the road and entered the Bouillon Favel.

Willie decided to follow these. The door of the restaurant looked so shabby that, if he had not seen all these men going in, he would have supposed that he had made a mistake. Just as he came to the door there passed in two girls. They gave him the same general impression which he had received from the artists of the other sex. They looked undersized, too broad for their height, with loose wisps of hair straying from under soft broad-brimmed hats.

Immediately inside the door he found himself in a long, low room. There was a little desk close to the door, behind which sat a fat Frenchman. A long table and a shorter one ran lengthwise on either hand down the room, and were served by two mild-eyed, patient-looking women in caps, and a young waiter whose hair was a black brush. The whole room seemed to be in an uproar ; but it was only the usual babel of voices. Willie rather shyly sat down in the first seat that offered itself ; and a woman, hurry-

ing by, thrust in front of him a wooden-handled frame with a *carte* in it. He was far too confused to make out the writing, but the word "veau" caught his eye, and he said, in rather a hang-dog manner,—

"Veau, s'il vous plait."

"Veau sauté ou blanquette de veau, m'sieu. Veau sauté, n'est-ce pas?"

"Oui," and the woman hurried off. Willie sat opposite a young man with black hair and beard, with rather a long neck and very sloping shoulders. The hair on his face had that unpleasant straggly character which seems to cover a large space, and yet show all the features behind it. His face was sallow and a little blotchy, even with strange little black spots on it. "What an unpleasant-looking chap," Willie thought. But the next moment he caught the vivacious and humorous eye, which redeemed the unpleasantness. He noticed, too, that the man's nose and mouth were really well formed. He was talking down and across the table to a lady some places

away on Willie's right. He spoke with a certain twang, but his voice was deep-toned and pleasant to the ear.

"What I say is," the young lady was saying, "if there's any good in a man, it's sure to come out in his painting."

"Why, how can you say that, Miss Fald?" said the man, stretching out his head towards her. "Why, according to you, then, St. Paul ought to have been a first-rate artist. I suppose you'd reckon, there was a good deal of good in him. I've never heard it came out in his pictures, anyway."

"He never painted any pictures," said Miss Fald, scornfully. "If he'd been. . ."

"He drew, though," put in a little man who was exactly opposite her, and two seats from the first speaker. "Drew crowded audiences, I've heard . . ." and he chuckled.

"I say," said the first speaker, "you'd better get those jokes let off before my sister comes round."

"Hollo! here you are," said Hope's voice behind Willie. . .

"Yes," said the man who had just spoken, "I've come here to-day; I'm expecting. . . Oh, I beg your pardon, Lancroft, I'm sure; I thought you spoke to me."

"Let me introduce you," said Hope, after he had sat down beside his cousin. "Mr. Winnstay, this is my little cousin, Mr. William Lancroft."

"Good morning, Mr. Lancroft." He stretched out his hand across the table, rather to Willie's surprise, and they shook hands. "I noticed you, sir, when you came into the room, and thought I'd never seen you here before. Well," he went on to Hope, "he might be reckoned a little cousin among the Patagonians, I daresay; but I think in this part of the world we should say he was about as big as a man ought to be. . . Do you remember," he went on, "what your Darwin says about the Patagonians?—leastways, I think it's the Patagonians.

It's always pleased me most awfully—"

"Well, if you put it in that way, I can't say I do," said Hope, looking at the *carte* which had just been handed to him. He had given a discontented look at the two girls seated lower down the table.

Willie, on his side, felt a certain agreeable excitement in the thought that his new acquaintances might include members of the other sex.

"Curl up. Well, he's talking"—and Winnstay turned rather to Willie—"about the valuing of domestic animals, or something like that, as a mark of civilization; and he goes on to say—he puts it this way: 'We see,' he says, 'the value put upon domestic animals even by the barbarians of Terra del Fuego by their killing and devouring their old women in time of dearth, as of less value than their dogs.' I do like that 'even' immensely."

"Why, the Patagonians and the Fuegians are not the same people.

You an American—Canadian anyway —and don't know that!" said Hope.

"What's the matter with your cousin this morning? He's got out of bed wrong way, that's clear. You've brought him to the wrong table, that's it," Winnstay said to Willie, with the humorous twinkle in his eyes.

"No, it isn't," Hope put in, smiling rather sourly.

"Where's my sister? That's what I want to know," Winnstay continued. "She can't be breakfasting with God Almighty at this time of day. Oh, here she comes. . ."

A moment after there moved silently to the seat beside him a girl who was dressed more like a Parisian than the two or three other lady artists at the table. Her dress and hat alike were of dark green trimmed with fur. The material was not dear; and there was something inappropriate and decidedly unfashionable in the appearance of this wintry dress in May. But at the same time the girl

seemed to have more care for her person and appearance than was common among the race of Anglo-Saxon art-students. There was something grave and self-contained in her sallow face. It carried on the same idea of unobtrusive completeness that her dress expressed. It was not pretty, and yet the features were regular. On the upper lip was a faint pencilling; the eyes were of a soft velvety brown; behind them a physiognomist might have detected a damped-down fire.

She nodded gravely to Hope, and seemed almost to *toiser* him a moment before her eyes dropped into her plate.

"We were just wondering—" said Hope, with a sort of sneer.

"Shut up," cried Winnstay, who knew what was coming; "don't let's have a row. Thyrza, let me present you to Mr. —I did not catch your name, sir," he said to Willie.

"If it's one of your irreverent jokes—" Miss Winnstay was beginning,

"Lancroft—oh, my Christian name's William."

"Mr. William Lancroft, Miss Thyrza Winnstay," the Canadian said, with great deliberation. Willie was going to laugh, thinking it was meant for a burlesque introduction; but as he encountered Miss Winnstay's grave look when she held out her hand, he blushed and became confused.

"And you came over from England last night, I suppose," said Miss Winnstay. "Did you come by Newhaven or by the mail?"

Willie satisfied her on that point.

"And are you come to work here—in the studios perhaps?" she went on.

"Oh, no; I've only come over for a week or two. I'm staying with Hope—with my cousin," corrected Willie.

"Well, now," said Winnstay, "is your name Hope? All the time I've known you, I never knew that! Why, Hope's a woman's name over in Canada, along with Faith and Charity."

"Yes," said Hope, with a laugh; "it's an idiotic name. I remember the children in our church at home used to howl out a hymn about,—

> "Faith and Hope and Charitee
> They go hand in hand all three."

"I never heard that hymn," said Miss Winnstay; "I guess you must have invented it. It's so pretty, anyway, I wonder you don't take to writing hymns, Mr. Lancroft."

"Hadn't I?" said Hope, and he turned towards Thyrza. "There was one little beggar called Tommy Wilkins in the choir," he went on. "You know what a choir is, don't you?"

Miss Winnstay gave a snort.

"No, not a bit, unless it's sheets of paper. Would you mind telling me just what a choir is, Mr. Lancroft?"

"I'll tell you another day," said Hope.

"But you're not going to stop and leave that story about Tommy Wilkins

unfinished, are you, Mr. Lancroft? I *shall* be sorry if you do." And, as if to mark the sincerity of her speech, she spoke across to a girl on the opposite side.

"Miss Fald, will you be so good as to pass me the water?"

"Stop," said a third girl, sitting on the other side of Miss Fald; "that's not the *carafe* of boiled water. Don't be so rash as drink Paris water after all this dry weather."

"Oh, I'm not going to drink boiled water," Miss Winnstay said. "I'd rather be an aquarium than a cemetery, anyhow."

. . . . .

It seemed to be an established custom that the ladies should leave soon after the *café noir* had been served and the cigarettes had been lighted; and after their departure the talk and uproar increased tenfold. Men shouted questions and answers to each other across the room; and when one man could not at-

tract the attention of another, he would throw a huge piece of bread to hit him if possible, or to fall, as chance might direct, into a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. But the talk, though in English, was for the most part in a language of which Willie Lancroft could hardly understand a word.

Two artists were holding a furious discussion over the subject of painted statues *à propos* of a figure which had just been bought by the nation.

Another was explaining how he was going to make use of a detective camera to get the true attitudes in motion.

"What's the matter with drawing?" said another man, with strong American accent.

"Why, it's to improve the drawing I'd do it," said the first speaker.

"It's all bosh, my dear fellow," a tall man shouted to him down the table. "You don't get the true attitudes in motion. The true attitudes are what you see. You can't improve the draw-

ing. Don't you agree with me, Lancroft?"

"Agree what? That you can't improve the drawing? That's true of plenty of fellows, Stanwick, for instance."

A large piece of bread was the response from the man spoken of.

Before this interruption Hope had turned to his cousin, and for the first time begun a conversation on private affairs. He asked him after Carry, if he had seen Edith, etc.

"Edith seems to like her husband. I found him precious dull," he said.

"Oh, I don't think he's at all a fool!" said Willie, who was modest in his judgment on other people.

"Dull chap, anyhow. One of those people who talk perpetually about things they don't understand, such as politics, and don't care anything about, for that matter. Well, what do you want to do now you're in Paris?"

"That's your affair. You've got to amuse me while I'm here."

"Have I?" Hope smiled pleasantly, and he had sometimes a very pleasant smile. "What shall we do with this Patagonian, Winnstay? He doesn't know anything about pictures, so there's no use taking him to the Salon and that sort of thing."

"To-night we'll take him to Bullier's."

"I want to begin by seeing Paris—just the town, I mean."

"Take him to Complet," said Winnstay. "Oh, don't you know that story? It's awfully rich! It's about—"

"Are you coming to the Café Trique?" said a man passing to Lancroft and Winnstay.

"Yes, I might go there," Hope answered back.

"I tell you," said Winnstay. "It's the Malory *fête* next Sunday. The McMurroughs and I are going. You'd best come too."

. . . . .

The evening of the first day was not unlike the morning.

It was then after their dinner that they went to the Café Trique. There it appeared to be a rather different company from Favel's. At any rate, those who led the conversation were of a new type, and Art was not at all the subject on the *tapis*.

"It was the finest thing I ever saw, to see him come along swinging that chain," a man was saying, when they took their seats. "You should have seen how he cleared out the shop! Jesus Christ! I thought he'd have killed half a dozen of 'em!"

"And how did they get him at last?"

"Oh! one of them damned *sergents-de-ville* got him at last. He lay low till he'd rushed past, and then got up and knocked him down with the flat of his sword. By gosh! he fell like an ox!"

"McSweeny's the chap when he's in liquor!" said another. "Last time, I'm damned if he didn't smash every single pane in Blanchard's *atelier*. He just came in while the boys were at work—A

most awful sight he was too! He'd been drinking for three days without stopping, pretty near—The French chaps cut out as if the devil was after them. It was them he wanted to get. And he took their things and sent 'em flying through the window. He always chose a fresh pane for every shot. I never laughed so much in my life. . . ."

"Say, Lancroft," a voice called out behind them, "did I hear you were going to Bullier's to-night?"

"Yes, I think I am! I've got a country cousin on hand. Here he is."

"Very glad to make your acquaintance, sir. I'll join the party, if you've no objection. I expect to meet my little girl there to-night."

And Willie's last recollections ere he went to bed were confused ones of a vast boarded room, open all along one side toward an unlit garden; of a band playing; of painted females of all ages, in dresses of all the tints of the rainbow; of orgiastic dances and Bacchanalian

shouts and yells which beggared all clear description even to himself, and outdid anything of the kind that he had seen hitherto.

And as he laid his swimming head and deafened ears upon the pillow, he made a half reflection, in substance the very reverse of Burke's, that Vice, when it kept all its grossness, as it did at the Bal Bullier, had very little power of attraction.

CHAPTER XVI.

WILLIE had been but six days in Paris; but he seemed already to have been there an eternity, and all his previous life to have been left apart as if it belonged to some one else. Nay, it was not easy to believe that all the varied experiences he went through now were those of one and the same person. Hope had said that his cousin cared nothing about Art. But it was impossible—for anyone so sympathetic as Willie Lancroft was, at least—to live in that atmosphere and continue to care nothing for it. Many of his mornings were spent at the Louvre, or at one or other of the picture galleries; and soon he felt that in some ways he bettered his instructors—that he saw more in the Venus de Milo than they saw, and had more sympathy with the delicate

patient work of the early Italians than they had. Next there were the streets to be explored—alone generally—from the fashionable parts which form all that the average English visitor knows of Paris, to the far heights of Montmartre; to the crowded *halles*, the narrow Rue Vieille du Temple, on to squalid revolutionary Belleville, over which looks the hill of Père-la-Chaise, the Land of Beulah to that region of No-Hope.

Then there was the sudden change; a spell cast over all this world when daylight had faded and gaslight had come, and Paris became diabolical chiefly, the haunt of shapes demoniac, Bacchanalian, of manifold diseases, of corruption. But in this also Willie took part under the guidance of the same mentors who had discoursed so eagerly, so enthusiastically, an hour or two before of "values," of "solidity" in art, and in all things; who spoke with a reverent awe of some of the great men of the past and of the present, of Velasquez, of Bastien Lepage.

It was curious to see these votaries of perfection dancing at Bullier's or the Moulin Rouge with women who turned their dresses into a sort of knicker-bockers, making hideous sounds the while; or drinking punch and singing unspeakable songs until, the excitement gaining on them, they would issue into the streets roaring down Mont Parnasse, a terror to quiet foot passengers, a delight to the lower class of women of the town.

On the seventh evening of his stay he was walking in the farther southern regions of Paris, parts where the English tourist rarely penetrates. He passed through squalid streets, where clothes were hanging up for sale, and fish were frying in fish-shops; then climbed a steep hill to the site of the old mill of "the meadows" and onward to the ramparts. A ceaseless crowd was passing through the Orleans Gate—the greater proportion entering the town. The most part looked dusty, hot, and eager, yet eager without any fixed purpose in their movements. It

was curious to watch them from the top of the rampart; to look up at the Mont Rouge, and then over a wide space of house-tops to the centre of Paris lying by the river.

Willie looked westward; the red glow of sunset still lingered in the north-west, and, behold, as he walked, there stole between him and the horizon a black object, which was in reality the first beginning of the portentous hideous Eiffel Tower, at that moment in its infancy. Then as this thing got clear of the neighbouring buildings, it opened out so that the ruddy cloud on which his eye was fixed was suddenly "flecked with bars," as was the sun by the phantom ship for the Ancient Mariner. It came like a revelation, a sudden symbol of the descent into the Paris of Night, which lay below him spreading out its arms to receive the Paris of Day. Was it only Paris? Was not the world, too, passing into those corrupt motionless waters?

> We were the first, who ever burst,
> Into that silent sea.

Did all this talk of the artists mean anything? Was there any real advance? Nay, was there any vitality in Art at all? He had heard that day Whitstone the American, whom Parisian art-students, artists even, spoke of with a kind of awe, discoursing to Hope on the "rubbish" which Ruskin talked about Art; and on the theme that Morality, that Faith, that Religion had nothing to say to Art. Art had nothing to do with national grandeur or national decay. It was merely a freak of Nature, not even a good thing in itself—so Whitstone had contended—a disease rather, like the pearl in the oyster, a kind of mental aberration. What was called genius was own brother to insanity. Thus Whitstone; or this, at least, was how Willie rendered the argument to himself.

What did they all mean, then, those past days of his, those days of waiting and poetizing? What did Mr. Sloane-Jarvis mean, and Willie's past devotion to him? Alas! it was past. Now for the first

time became intelligible that other voice which had begun to speak the morning (only a month ago!) when Willie breakfasted with his ancient hero. All in a moment he seemed to have grown up, grown old. It was horrible, unreal; the world was crumbling beneath him. But for all that it was exciting, this rush and hurry of the artists and authors to *do* something. He felt at the very moment when his faith in Art, in Inspiration, in all things seemed paralyzed, that he was endowed with a fresh energy. He too would rush and hurry on, no matter to what goal. *Something* he would do between this moment and the "finis" of the tomb.

The day was gone; the gaslights were everywhere; the light in the clouds was of the faintest, and a star or two appeared looking down as things having evidently no relation to this terrene planet.

. . . . .

The day following, Sunday, was the day of the *fête* at Malory. They went

down a party of seven, Stanwick, the two McMurroughs (Rouge et Noir, as they were called), the two Lancrofts, Winnstay, and Armand Joly—three Englishmen, two Scotch-Irish-Americans (for the McMurroughs were all this: Glasgow-Irish by parentage, American by birth and citizenship) a Canadian, and a Frenchman. Joly had filled his pockets with the little sweets we call hundreds and thousands (paper *confetti* were not invented then), and these he showered on the heads of the people who attempted to mount into their compartment, until the *chef-de-gare* came up and threatened them. But students are privileged persons, and his threats were not very serious.

The train sped along in bright sunlight, past many windings of the Seine, past new villas and country houses, imitating the red-and-white of French Renaissance architecture, past great waves of land, intersected only by long rows of poplars, which looked strangely bare in comparison with English landscape, past

quiet, beautiful French villages with brown roofs, gable-less, outlined in white. Finally they plunged into the Forest of Fontainebleau, and did not emerge till their two hours' journey had come to an end, and they reached the station of Malory.

The officials seemed alert and pleased at the arrival of the little band, most of whom were already known at Malory, and came like a foretaste of the summer flight of *artistes-peintres*. For art and artists are popular in France. The omnibus-driver precipitated himself to take from the elder McMurrough the one bag which served for the wardrobes of the whole party and the two banjo-cases.

"Vous avez des bagages dans le fourgon, m'sieu?" said the station-master, joining the group.

"Non — non," said McMurrough, "nous restons doux nuits soulement."

"Bravo, Mac!" cried Hope; "you speak French as well as Joly does; only it ought to be *douces nuits*."

"They will be *douces nuits* for the rest of the crowd at Beausier's, I reckon," said Winnstay, "and I mean to *rester soûl-ment*, I know that."

Joly, who had been too polite to laugh before, laughed a little now. "À la gare, comme à la gare," he said, in a deprecating way. On Willie the jokes were lost.

Hope took the lead of the party, as he generally took the lead of his companions. He had a marvellous, rapid, ungrammatical French of his own, of which he was not the least ashamed, though they had a Frenchman of their party. It was funny, Willie thought, to see him standing square before Madame Beausier, with his hands in his jacket pockets, and jabbering away like that, especially with a regular Frenchman close by. But Willie did not appreciate what a wonderful character Hope's French was of, or he would have thought it funnier—what a strange conglomeration of Anglicanisms and of French idioms caught up by

chance, all delivered with perfect fluency and *sang-froid.*

"Eh bien, M'dame Beausier, comment va-t-il? Il nous faut un peu de diner n'est-ce pas? Ce que vous avez, vous savez, n'importe quoi. Seulement, dépêche, dépêche, dépêche. . . . Ah! c'est Sophie n'est-ce pas?" (as a little girl advanced from behind the table). "Tiens, la gentille p'tite fille; n'est-ce pas—isn't she? J'aimerai bien la peindre. Tiens, la p'tite, si j'ai quelque chose dans ma poche pour vous. Voilà! Faut me donner un baiser, n'est-ce pas? . . .

"Eh bien montons. Sont les chambres préparées, m'mselle la bonne. M'mselle la bonne, mon cousin; mon cousin, la bonne m'mselle."

"Je m'pelle Susanne, m'sieu. M'sieu ne m'remet pas.

"Mais, pour sûr, maintenant je t'rappelle très bien. Donnez moi un baiser, ma chère Susanne. Susanne et les—Elders. What's elders in French, Susanne? Ah! vous—tu ne comprends pas. . . ."

All which made him very popular at Malory; as indeed all the artists were. They made the life of the place.

After dinner, Joly and the younger Mac took their banjos—Joly's rendering of nigger-minstrel songs was reckoned especially fine. First they sang in the *café*, till a large and larger crowd collected to hear them. Then the whole body issued forth, singing and shouting round the village. It was lucky that the French girls did not know English, and so could not understand the meaning of the songs they listened to so complacently.

Willie, with the others, mounted on merry-go-rounds, bought and showered about sweets of all kinds, consumed bocks, and, when night began, danced with half the girls in Malory. He had gone to such entertainments in England with his brother clerks. Then it had all seemed vulgar and rowdy; and though he joined in it, he did so against the grain, seeing the reproving figure of his school mentor dress itself before his con-

science. Now that he was with artists, recognized artists some of them, such as Winnstay and Hope, it all seemed right and proper.

The ball went on through the short May night; a huge marquee with the floor not too well laid; the band perched up in the middle; a *vestiaire* on the left, where the more refined of the company left their hats; and at the upper end a *buvette*, where smoking was allowed. The entrance was half a franc; each dance cost two sous apiece (the gallants paying for their partners); and before the entrance was posted up the only regulation about dress: people were not allowed to come in blouses, and soldiers were to *moucheter* their spurs.

Now and again the dancers wandered out into the night, singly or with their partners, or came to refresh at the *café* instead of in the tent. And Willie, strolling out once alone, looked up and saw the Dragon stretching right above his head, curving his long neck

between the two Wains, and spreading his shadowy wing. The Greater Wain had wheeled far round its course.

Malory stood on the slope of a hill which ended in the forest; and on all sides except on that forest side the circle of the heavens with all its stars was visible. There stretched the Milky Way, turning to a white smoke when it came near the horizon. A shooting-star issued out of nothingness, and returned to it again.

"How seldom one looks at the stars!" Willie Lancroft thought. "You can scarcely see them in London. . . . This is a queer way to be star-gazing though. . . . . But with these artists and clever fellows it must be all right." He had walked a little way, up to the edge of the village; and now the notes of the band were softened by distance. Of a sudden, a low, surpassingly sweet whistle came out of the wood, and another answered it from afar off. A nightingale! It seemed inappropriate to his present situa-

tion; the bird's note made him feel melancholy. He went back to the ball.

. . . . .

Phil Mac said, meeting him a little later, "Most of the bhoys have gone into our room to have a liquor up." So they left.

In the McMurroughs' bedroom—the only good-sized bedroom that belonged to the party—they found a table covered with bottles and glasses, three or four canettes of beer, black bottles of cognac and kirsch and kümmel, siphons, and bottles of St. Galmier. Three or four of the party, Hope among them, were there already; and in the course of the next hour the number became complete. Meanwhile, the light gradually changed, and, by the latter time, though one candle was still left burning, it was broad daylight.

The talk took the strangest turn.

"No, ut wasn't here. Ut was at Buissons-sur-Seine. That's not in this

forrust at hall," the elder Mac was saying when Willie came in. "But ut's just abhoot three miles from here. Arn't I right, Joly, that he killed umself at Buissons?"

"Yes, it was there," the Frenchman answered; "but it was in the forest, in the Forest of Champagne. And he hanged himself, not shot himself, which was so strange."

"Yes, I should think that would be such a stuffy death," said Hope. "He was a very good artist.

> "S'il n'était pas dans l'alcool,
> Comme il eût fait des grandes choses."

Hope sang from a popular song of the day. "A woman, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! A woman, of course," said Joly.

"Who are you talking of, Tasquier?" said Winnstay, who had just come in.

"What way should you commit suicide by if you had to choose?" said Willie to his next neighbour, the younger McMurrough.

"Well, I think I would choose prussic acid," he said with deliberation.

"I think I should choose drowning," said Willie; "you're said to get wonderful sorts of visions."

"No, no; much the best way is charcoal," said Joly. "Prussic acid—well, you would find it difficult to get, you know. But a little pan of charcoal, and you shut up all the doors and windows and go softly to sleep on your bed and never wake more." And he threw his head on one side, and a heavenly, dreamy smile illuminated his countenance.

"Yes. Oh, yes, charcoal's much the best way," most of the others assented, as if they had all had experience of suicide.

"I remember," said Stanwick, "finding poor Lemesurer in that way. Was that before you came here, Lancroft?"

"He came from Quebec, you know, first of all," said Winnstay.

"Canadian of some sort, I know. Did you know anything of him out there?"

"Yes. I heard about it. It was *the* most extraordinary story I ever heard—"

"Very horrible, I heard."

"No, not in the way you mean. It's true enough that he fell in love with his own sister, and committed suicide when he found out she was his sister, and not his cousin as he thought."

"But how could a man possibly think his sister was his cousin?"

"That's what one would say. But it came about like this. His father had a brother whom he'd quarrelled with out in Quebec, and the brother left Canada and set up business in Paris. Well, after a little while, the Canada Lemesurer got married, and a year or two after that, he got divorced from his wife. Well, the wife came to Paris, and she got married to the other brother."

"But how on earth did she manage to find out the other brother?"

"Oh, well, I guess his address would be known, and that there were business transactions of some kind between the

two brothers. The one in Canada was a lumber merchant. Means that when a raft of lumber comes down the rivers there, it's sold to these men who ship to Europe. I reckon the woman would come to Maurice Lemesurer, and make his acquaintance as a Canadian. Anyway, she had a daughter by him, and then she died. Well, John Lemesurer got married again, and he died too, in time, and left his son by letter to the care of his uncle Maurice. So you see it came about quite natural like, that the young John and Maurice's daughter, I don't know what her name was, should fall in love. And when he found out what was the real state of the case, I suppose he just did for himself in the way you've said."

The talk went on for some while longer in the same vein. Winnstay was obviously getting affected by the liquor. How ill he looked, now that his face was in repose, and how wretched! The candle shone on his thin ascetic-looking face.

"Tiens," said Joly to Hope aside, "pour une tête de Jésus-Christ. Au Jardin des Oliviers." He got a piece of paper from his pocket, and began making a sketch.

The bright day-light was streaming in at the window. It all seemed to Willie rather phantasmal, rather horrible. What a curious callousness seemed to underlie the relationships of these friends, whom chance had brought together from all the quarters of the globe, and chance might part again to-morrow and part by such strange ways!

And yet it was all wonderfully exciting, exhilarating in a way.

CHAPTER XVII.

They returned to Paris on the Tuesday. And on that evening Willie wrote off to his sister Charlie, giving utterance in a confused way to the thoughts which were bubbling within him.

"I never had such an exciting time in my life," Willie wrote to his sister, "as I have had, since I came away from England. I hate writing descriptions—all the meaning of the thing seems to go away while you are writing—or else I should like to tell you some of the sights I have seen. I've not been in Paris only, for we made an excursion into the country, and stayed at a little country inn and went to a ball—such a rum affair. I'll tell you all about that, when you come to me in your holidays.

"But that's not nearly all. The people

here are so different from anything I've ever met before. They are not Frenchmen, you know. I mean, we don't live among Frenchmen; but English, and Americans, and Canadians; most of them artists or art-students. But I've met one or two others who are not: most awfully queer chaps some of them. It would be impossible for me to describe them. They are all awfully clever and sharp, and talk much more than fellows do in England, somehow. I expect it's the air of Paris. It seems to excite you and make you expand, you know (like an india-rubber ball), till you feel you must talk or you would burst. In England, I find fellows talk nearly always about the same sort of things, different kinds of amusement and so on (except of course Sloane-Jarvis, but he's one man in a thousand). But here they talk away about all manner of things, just the things I like talking about, and uncommonly well too, some of them. I shall never be a good talker, I see that.

My ideas seem all to come into my head at once. That's why I'm making such a muddle of this letter.

"They think an awful lot of Hope here. In some ways, he's quite different from what he was in London. You'll see Carry next month, and she'll tell you what he was like in London. He was always chaffing and that sort of thing; but at the same time, he gave one the impression that he didn't think one's opinion was worth anything, and that he didn't care what anyone in London thought about him. He's much the same with me here, and a good deal the same with a lot of the fellows. But he hasn't got such an air of swagger as he had there. He used to pretend he only cared about being able to make a lot of money by his drawings. Here he sometimes talks very sensibly about art and doing good work—as a lot of the fellows here do, and not in a pretentious way either—though even here, he interlards it with chaff and what is really humbug.

What most of the men think about him is that he is a careless sort of genius, who could do anything if he were ambitious enough. But I am pretty sure, really, that he's tremendously ambitious, and that he takes a lot more trouble than they fancy. I think, too, that he's always a little bit acting a part, without knowing that he is. However, he has been very jolly to me. We always thought him a very queer chap, you know, and I think so still. I don't think any of his friends here really know what he is like, and I don't believe he'd be perfectly happy with anyone who did. One thing certain is, that he's awfully clever in a lot of different ways. All sorts of people — well-known French authors, for instance—look up to him in a sort of way.

"I feel very small beside him, and never can think of the way to express myself at the moment. But at the same time, I can't help thinking that Hope's on the wrong tack, and that half the fellows

here are too. All their ideas of art and things of that sort, are so different from what we've been accustomed to think. At present, I've had no time to think them over, so I've no idea where they're wrong ; but I'm sure they're wrong somewhere. When you come and stay with me, we'll worry it all out. I'm too excited to think. But I never felt keener at observing things, than I have since I came here; in fact, I feel as if I had become a perfectly different being in that respect. I used to go about observing nothing, trying to shut my eyes on all that was around me, and to concentrate my thoughts on more poetical things. That's the sort of thing that I feel sure that Hope and most of the artists, etc., about here, would say was just what one ought *not* to do, if one wants to be an artist in painting or in words. They would say that art is spoiled by too much thinking and philosophizing and moralizing. *Soyez naïf* is one of their phrases. I couldn't translate it in the way they

understand it ; but I have a feeling that it includes a tremendous lot.

"Anyhow, now I feel, through contagion partly I suppose, quite different from what I used to feel, and inclined to notice everything I pass by and keep my *self* as much out of my thoughts as possible. I am writing confusedly because I can't think clearly. But I feel that it is a matter of tremendous importance to me to know whether I am going right or wrong. I felt, when I crossed over, that I was going to make a great step in literature (for I am determind to get on in literature despite all previous failures—only I don't think anything of the *Stoa* poem now that I sent you last week). But I feel too that the change is taking place in me quite apart from my own control, and I would give anything to know whether it is a change for the good or a change for the bad."

. . . . .

"Well," said Hope to his cousin, "how do you like Paris ?"

"Oh, first rate," said Willie, and his face glowed.

"Rum set of chaps you meet here, don't you? Scum of the world, some of them."

"Oh. They're awfully interesting, and, I should think, awfully clever, most of them."

"Yes: I don't go in for fools. All the same, Paris c'est la cloaque de l'Europe, I say sometimes."

"Cloaque—sewer? How rum. Why—"

"Still, it's the only possible place to live in. English people are so dull."

"Certainly you're not dull here," said Willie with enthusiasm.

Hope took it as a compliment to himself, and felt extremely cordial. Would it be possible to attach this amiable cousin to himself by some tie? It must of course, Hope felt, be a tie which left Hope's superiority unchallenged. If he were to lend him money to do as Hope himself had done, begin a new career in Paris? But then what career was he

likely to succeed in? He seemed to be cleverish in a way; but he evidently had no idea of art. Of course with Hope's guidance anybody might with a little study become an art-critic. Hope knew next to nothing of his cousin's literary aspirations.

A good many men of his set in Paris looked up to Hope in a kind of way, and paid an unconscious tribute to his strength of will. But, in such a shifting society as this, that meant nothing very permanent in the way of an attachment; and Hope, despite his affectation of cynicism, was in reality more dependent on human sympathy than his cousin was. There was Winnstay of course. But Winnstay, though as clever as you like, was morally such a weak chap that his fidelity was no compliment. Willie, in a certain sense gave one a sort of impression that he would do something. He was always supposed in the family to be clever, though those public school geniuses—Hope thought very little of them.

Hope was revolving these changing thoughts as he emerged from his passage, and crossed the Boulevard Mont Parnasse. In the Rue Notre Dame des Champs, there passed him Thyrza Winnstay, who hardly nodded as she walked by.

But Hope quickened his step. The niceties of manner were not observed (in either sense) among the art-students and artists of the quarter. Hope had a partly real and a partly affected disdain for the girls who where studying art in Paris. He knew them destined to remain *amateurs*, and suspected them to be essentially humbugs. His other relations with their sex were of such a different kind from his intercourse with the women art-students, that he scarcely remembered to which division of the population most of Thyrza's kind belonged. As Winnstay's sister he had got into a certain intimacy with her. It was only six months since she had joined her brother. And she had just that much of merit that she talked less about

art and devotion to art than the other girls did.

"Well, you're in a great hurry, Thyrza. Going to Colarossi's?"

"No."

"How's Paul?" (that was Winnstay's name).

"Well," said Thyrza turning suddenly upon him, "I should think you might know how Paul is when you're doing all the harm you can to him all the time."

"I? What do you mean? What harm have I done him?"

"You and his other friends. Nice friends you are! You know you're just killing my brother among you. I wish I could take him away so that he could never see one of you again. And it's worst of all with you," she said, flashing out at Hope.

It came like a thunderclap. Of course Winnstay did drink a lot. But then so many fellows did the same. They don't kill themselves—not for a long time anyway.

"You're most awfully unjust, Thyrza," Hope began.

"I'll thank you not to call me Thyrza, Mr. Lancroft, please."

"Well, Miss Winnstay, I mean; I beg your pardon," said Hope who was a gentleman at bottom, in spite of his affectation of roughness. "But it's rot talking like that! You can't say to a fellow he must drink nothing but water when he comes to your studio."

"You could if you cared anything about him."

"You can't, I say," said Hope, trying to master his passion. "It's because you don't understand anything about these things. . . I tell you what," he went on after a moment's thought, "I'll swear off myself if Winnstay will do the same." Then he felt what an awful sacrifice he was entailing on himself and wished he had not made the offer.

"How can I get him to?" said Thyrza. "I—I didn't say it was you alone;" her voice trembled a little. "I

shall take him away from all of you if I can."

"Well: if it will do any good," said Hope, in a sympathetic voice.

Thyrza cast one quick searching glance upon him, and turned down another street.

When she reached their *appartement* in the Rue d'Assas she locked herself into her room, took off her hat and threw herself on the bed with her face in the pillow, and her shoulders shook with a few short sobs. But she did not remain very long in this attitude. She got up, wiped her eyelashes, and took up her hat again.

"Well, now, I suppose I'll never speak to him any more, scarcely. So much the better."

She went off to seek the ghostly counsels of the Rev. Father Ilgray of the Episcopalian Church, and on her way said to herself, "Anyhow, it'll stop his talking to me like a child or another man." She was not thinking of Father Ilgray when she said this.

She did not find the vicar, but his curate, Father Doble. Father Doble was not a pleasant-looking man. He had a pink face and humid prominent eyes under red eye-lids, and his mouth was unpleasantly large and loose. But he was an enthusiast on the subject of temperance.

. . . . .

Little as Thyrza imagined it, the idea of marrying her had not been entirely absent from Hope's mind. A month ago when Edith had suggested the notion of his marrying, he had acknowledged to himself, without enthusiasm, that if he ever did present her with a sister-in-law it would be as likely to be Thyrza Winnstay as anyone. Romantic love Hope did not believe in—not at any rate between husband and wife. What made Thyrza stand out superior to the rest of the reputable young women whom he came across, was that there was so much less of the art-student about her than about the rest, while she was certainly not inferior

to them in ability. Of course that religious craze of hers would wear out.

And there was certainly no hurry. A certain coquettish model, Rose Roussell supplied as much romance to Hope Lancroft's life as he felt the need of at present.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Hope Lancroft still kept the same habits and tastes that he had acquired in his days of poverty; only that he had, since the advent of his prosperous days, as it were expanded them. His present *ménage* in the Passage du Bocage was on the same plan as his first in the Impasse de la Touraine had been. The atelier was work-room and sleeping-room in one; but it was a very large one. There was, besides, a little kitchen used for washing purposes, and for other purposes as well, such as hoarding boxes of colours and canvas-frames, for stretching and sizing canvasses. ("When there are any number of public baths about, what on earth do you want with elaborate washing apparatus?" Hope said.)

Most of the more successful of his artist friends had moved to smarter quarters near the Luxembourg ; but Lancroft preferred the freedom and airiness of his high situation, where the sun set over the graves of the Mont Parnasse cemetery. He maintained, too, that all the Luxembourg neighbourhood was *infect.* For did not Bordereau live there, that abortion of Art?

Hope's habits too had kept their ancient character. He still dined at the old cheap restaurants. But when he wanted a change he *faisait la noce* in various companies, often standing treat, and thus affirming his influence upon most of those who were his equals in age. He did not entertain in the sense that young English authors and artists do, who are members of expensive London clubs. But he made it a rule to have a good supply of liquors and liqueurs, acquired regardless of cost (He had been fortunate in putting his hand upon the best Irish whisky to be got in Paris) and some excellent cigars.

His intercourse with his fellow creatures had undergone a similar kind of expansion without changing its essential character. He kept up with his contemporaries in age, who were many of them scarcely more than art-students, while he was on the way to become a celebrity. But his newly-acquired reputation had brought him into contact with a great many men who did not belong to the art-student set, journalists and authors and playwrights of distinction, some quite young men, some middle-aged; and with intellectual men of various kinds who sought their companionship. With men such as these Hope came in contact in his quality as illustrator; but he kept their friendship in virtue of his intellectual gifts, which were by no means limited to his art. By chance or design, or both, he had even come to hold what might be called a salon, in his rooms on Saturday nights—a reunion, of course, of the male sex only. Any kind among Hope's miscellaneous acquaintance might have come to these

evenings. But as a matter of fact it was only the rather superior ones who did come. Hope was utterly careless of social distinction ; but he had an eye for any other sort of superiority, and none of that super-sensitiveness which might have prevented another person from weeding out the intellectually second-rate among his friends.

. . . . .

It was on the second Saturday—near a fortnight after his arrival in Paris—that Willie saw his cousin in this new capacity. The previous Saturday he had spent alone.

Willie was the first to enter his cousin's rooms that evening. The studio was a large one, and was lighted from one side and from above. There was a long low couch on which Willie settled himself, and, leaning back, his head came just below the place where the skylight rose from the wall. The skylight rose to a good height, then sloped to meet the ceiling. Though there was a lighted

lamp on the mantelpiece, Willie could see, from where he sat, the clouds passing above his head still faintly tinged with rose.

At one end of the long low seat, stowed away to make room, was an easel, on which stood a *pochade* in oils, a man with a rough face and red hair, naked to the waist, and with a red band above his blue trousers, sawing wood; and all along the wall behind the settee were canvasses turned face to the wall, paint-boxes, lay-figures lying flat, *chiffons* of various kinds. In another corner opposite had been shoved a long mirror, which now showed the back of the frame only, and the top of an easel sticking out behind it. Between these two corners stood the fireplace; between the mirror and the door stood a large round table in carved black oak, now covered with bottles and glasses, siphons, boxes of cigars, and cigarettes. Two square arm-chairs in stamped leather, another covered in rather dirty chintz, two deck chairs, and three or four cane-bottomed ones were

ranged about this end of the room. The walls were not papered, but they were covered by such a number of pictures, illustrations in black-and-white, some framed, some nailed only on to the wall, some original studies in charcoal, in chalk, in washes, others woodcuts or process engravings, that not much of the original distemper was visible. At the farther end of the room were one or two bookcases. The old table and the leather chairs, the drawings and the books, gave a certain air of refinement and finish to the room; and this was emphasized by the tapestry curtain which hung at the extreme end, shutting off the sight of Hope's bed and nocturnal furniture, and by a handsome Louis XIII. cabinet which stood between that curtain and the door.

Hope scarcely spoke, for he was in the act of making a punch; and Willie had been seated some minutes when there entered a tall American. Willie had never seen him among the company who

frequented Favel's or Trique or the Devil's Kitchen. He wore his hair short, carried pince-nez, and altogether looked more a man of the world than most of Hope's associates, Willie thought; though he did not then personally know much about men of the world. Willie thought, too, he could detect from Hope's manner, that the new comer was an artist of sufficient distinction to be able even to patronize the black-and-white draughtsman, and further, that Hope was lying in wait to meet and counter-check any attempt on the part of his guest to do this.

Hope introduced him as Mr. Sherrington.

"So you're just spending a few days to look round Paris, Mr. Lancroft," said the new-comer. "Thank you, yes, I'll take a cigarette," he said to Hope, and he seated himself beside Willie on the long settee. Then, after a pause, "You're not an artist yourself, I suppose?" he said to the latter.

"No; oh, no," Willie replied. "In fact I knew nothing about art till I came here."

"You'll have heard a good deal about art *since* you came here, I reckon," said Sherrington, with a faint smile, looking at Hope.

Willie smiled too, in his attractive school-boy fashion, and the new-comer's face at once became more cordial.

"Yes. But it's awfully interesting," Willie said. "It's all different from what I imagined. The whole theory of art seems to be different from what we used to hear. I—I've been trying to think it out, and apply it to literature." He spoke more unconstrainedly because Hope had gone into the adjoining room to get some cigars.

The American looked for a moment as if he would like to enter upon the discussion which Willie had suggested; but a want of ready speech and the consciousness of his "position" came in and forbade his doing so, so he only said,—

"Then, if I may guess, your occupation is rather literary than artistic?"

"It's neither," said Hope, who came into the room at the moment. "My cousin's a bank clerk. . . But he's a very intellectual bank clerk," he added, smiling his grim smile.

The American stiffened. Willie could not help flushing, and he felt furiously angry for a moment. But at the next moment Winnstay and Stanwick, the Englishman, came in together. Sherrington rose from his seat to shake hands with them. He did this gravely, and somehow made it evident that he was doing them some honour by the act. They themselves seemed to be sensible of the fact. Then another American, an artist likewise, Archer by name, came in. He was much more easy in manner than his compatriot; but Willie heard afterwards that his reputation was as high as Sherrington's.

At first one of those interminable dis-

cussions arose with which Willie had already begun to grow familiar.

"I suppose you know," said Hope, "that Dubecq's going to get a *médaille d'honneur*."

"Come off the roof!"

"It's true, I tell you. I was at Goupil's to-day, and I met Morat there. He told me. It was a secret then; but it will be out to-morrow morning."

"What's that for?"

"For doing the worst thing in the Salon this year."

"Anyway, it's the largest."

"Oh, that's bally rot. There's awfully few living artists I tell you, can touch Cardan Dubecq at his best."

And as each new-comer entered, he took part in the dispute.

But a diversion was caused at last by the entry of three fresh figures, two of whom were in evening dress. The third wore a neat round jacket tightly buttoned and an all-round stand-up collar. This last had close-cropped light hair, and a

curled moustache. His face was fair and pale, and he had rather prominent blue eyes. Willie heard him called M. des Hérouilles. Of the other two, one looked, with his short dark hair and pointed beard, quite as much like a Frenchman as M. des Hérouilles; but his name was Pell; and Willie gathered that he was a well-known art critic. The third of the group was the most remarkable of the three on account of his pale, melancholy face and a pair of remarkably fine blue eyes. When he had taken off his light overcoat it appeared that he was slightly deformed—one shoulder was certainly higher than the other.

Winnstay, who had seated himself on Willie's other side, got up to shake hands with Pell.

"Well," he said, "have you been telling your public what to look at in the Salon? I hope you haven't omitted to notice a certain *bocage* in room twenty. I'm told by all the critics that that's about the finest thing there."

"Much the finest," said Hope, turning round, though he had been speaking to the high-shouldered man, "so fine that most people never catch sight of it." And he turned back to offer his hospitalities to M. des Hérouilles.

"Merci, non. No tank you. Oh, anything; yes tanks—a glass of *fine*," Willie heard him say. "I have seen your drawings for *Le Diable Boiteux*. But they are—excellent, excellent. . ." Willie caught no more words; but he saw several pantomimic actions expressive of the handling of a brush or of a pencil.

Then he heard the beautiful hunch-backed man say to Hope,—

"Pell's been taking me to-day to see Prebowsky's new picture."

"Well, what do you think of it, sir?" broke in Winnstay, who was standing by the table. "I say that the Blessed Virgin Mary's no right to look such a played-out middle-aged woman as he makes her there. What do you think of the picture, Lancroft?"

"I don't think anything about it. It may be a good likeness of the lady in question; but as she lived before my time, I can't say."

Meantime, the second American artist, Archer, had come up to Willie and asked him if he was going to stay "a little time longer" in Paris. "I suppose you know that that cousin of yours," he went on in his loud deliberate tones—for Hope had now come back to a seat near his own—"is coming out just about the smartest draughtsman in black-and-white we've got over here."

"Don't you pull his leg," said Hope, breaking off in his talk with Des Hérouilles. "Don't you believe him," he said to Willie. "The Yanks are all like that; as you'll find when you've been over here a little while."

(Willie wondered if the refined American near him on the other side heard this. But he was deep in a conversation with Pell. "I would like you to come and see it very much," he was

saying. "I've got on quite a little way with it since you were in my atelier.")

"I'm much more likely to pull your nose, young man," Archer replied to Hope, "if you speak against the stars and stripes. I was just about to add," he went on, turning again to Willie, "when I was interrupted, that as for handling colours, your cousin's a babe at it."

M. des Hérouilles seemed to be immensely delighted at this sally. He showed all his small white teeth in a grin.

"'E—'andles—chinks," he said, speaking with a great deal of deliberation and smiling more than ever.

"Oh, he may do that," said Archer; "that only shows him to be an inferior artist. Now you and I," and he turned round to Stanwick on his other side, "who really can paint, don't sell so many of our pictures as—I could wish," he added, dropping his voice to a mournful tone.

"Exactly," said the man addressed. "There's nothing more essentially vulgar than making money by art. Does the nightingale get a honorarium for singing? Does the rose spread its perfume around at so much an hour? By no means. By no manner of *means*," he added, striking his hand sharply on the thigh of his next neighbour.

"Now, young man!" said Archer, standing up, "you'd better moderate your enthusiasm, or you'll be getting yourself disliked. Your periods are good enough without that kind of emphasis."

"Stanwick's periods! Corpo di Bacco," said Pell from across the room.

"Did you see the picture they were talking about?" said Winnstay to Willie. He was not drinking much and appeared now to be in rather a depressed frame of mind. Willie thought he had seen his cousin stop him from taking the bottle on one occasion.

"Yes, I went to see it to-day. I must

say I thought it very clever and very ugly. . . ."

"You don't call the painting of the woman ugly, do you?" said Pell.

"I daresay it was very good . . ." Willie began.

"I agree with you, sir," Archer struck in. "It's an ugly picture taking it all round."

"Oh!" exclaimed Stanwick, with a strong shake of the head.

"Well, of course I don't profess to know anything about painting. . . ."

"Don't you be too sure of that, sir," said Archer, "Attending a studio does not imply a knowledge of art by any means. . . ." And he looked in the direction of Hope.

"Were you trying to get at me by that remark?" said Hope. "Why don't you go and help yourself to some liquor, instead of standing up there jawing like a Kentucky congressman?"

"Well, I think I will go and investigate the contents of that table," Archer

went on. "Though if I wanted to get at you, I hope I should know how to do it better than that. I was rather thinking of my friend Pell here" (he was standing by the table close to Pell as he spoke), "who, we all know, is about the finest art critic that they make any parts this side of the Atlantic (though whether he calls himself an English critic or a French one I don't know, and you can't tell by looking at him). Still, the other day when he was trying to show us with a bit of charcoal, the way a cow's legs were fixed on, we all thought he was making a design for the new tower they're going to build on the Champ de Mars. I don't know whether you were there, Des Hérouilles," he went on. "That was in Brossart's rooms. Brossart was trying just all he knew to be polite about it, and say it really was very like a cow's leg, only he'd never seen it that way before."

"I must say," said a man who had come in late, and whose name Willie did not

catch, speaking for the first time, "I think that Child Bathing of Brossart's almighty good. I don't like the way he smooths his paste down as if it were an asphalte pavement. Still, if he doesn't get a medal this year, it will be an awful shame."

"I agree with you," said Sherrington. "But he won't."

"No, you may gamble on that," said Archer.

"Not a chance of it," said Pell, who gloried in knowing all the gossip of the ateliers. "In the first place Flamand has got three men from his own studio to shove in for a medal or a mention. Then Poinsard is sure to have a look in, and it's time he should, though he's not done very well this year. Still, if it was only for *Aspasie* he ought to have a medal."

"Then there's friend Philippine," put in Winnstay.

"Yes, of course,—there's Philippine," said Stanwick. "She's Cardan Dubecq's *massière* now, they tell me. I met her the

other day. You know she doesn't love me . . ."

"Because you don't love her," said Hope.

"No. By no means. She's never given me the chance. I'd do that fast enough if she would. She's hated me ever since I was at Dubecq's studio. I wanted to be awfully polite to her, so I told her I'd read in the paper that her painting was very *chic*. I thought then it was an awfully nice thing to say."

"No? Oh my! You said that! How good!" said Archer.

"And she'd just been having that row with the Hungarian girl at Terrien's, who wrote in the papers that Philippine *chiqued* all her work. So you can imagine how mad she was with me. And the other fellows there laughed at me like anything. They thought I'd said it for cheek."

"She's a spiteful little thing," said Winnstay. "She served my sister an awfully nasty trick the other day . . ."

"Well, she's got the Hungarian girl on

her back now, that's one thing. She'll be her match for saying nasty things, I know."

"They say she's not going to live, that Hungarian girl."

At this moment a voice was heard in the court below. Hope had removed from this group and was engaged in showing a portfolio of drawings to Gourlay, the man with the high shoulder and large blue eyes, on whose other side was Sherrington. One man threw open the window wider, and leant out talking to the figure below. Presently he turned round.

"Did you hear what he says, that Lehee's got a first medal?"

"Come off."

"Well, that's what Flaherty says," and at that moment a knock came and Flaherty entered.

"The top of the morning to ye, Mr. Lancroft," he said. "I've just come up to pass the news, that's all; for I'm going on to the ball at Lacrosse's this evening.

Cardan Dubecq's got an honour medal. Lehee, Gotchaux have got first medals. Pardon, Philippine Bordet, Phipson, Waters a lot more second and third medals. You've got a third medal, Stanwick, and much good may it do ye. And now I'm off to the ball."

"So am I, so am I, I forgot it was Lacrosse's night," said some of the others, Stanwick amongst them.

"That manes a supper to us, man!" said Flaherty from the doorway, when he saw Stanwick rise. . .

"Well, I'm glad Stanwick's got a medal at any rate," said Hope. "But I don't think he's ever sold a picture yet."

"And not very likely to," said Pell.

"Well, there's some very good work in his pictures," said Winnstay, who young as he was, was already, like Archer and Sherrington, *hors concours*. "But to think of Brossart not having a medal, I call that a real shame."

And some more artistic shop followed.

CHAPTER XIX.

THERE were now left in the room only seven persons, Gourlay, Pell, Sherrington, Archer, Winnstay and the two Lancrofts. Amid the light talk which was going on, it came like an electric shock to Willie, to catch sight of Winnstay with his head resting on his hand, and in his face an expression of exaggerated and fictitious despair, born of a *crise de nerfs* which had followed an attempt to leave off drinking. Winnstay had been pursuing the bent of his own thoughts, and now raised his head and spoke.

"Well, I call it an almighty shame," he said, speaking to no one in particular. "I'm told that Brossart lived for three years on a franc a day, when he first came to Paris. Now he'll never get his

medal, I don't believe, not because he don't paint a lot better than I do, or a hundred times as well as that *cochon* Lehee, but because his way of painting doesn't happen to be the fashion. What's the good of it ?" he went on, growing more and more serious. "Look at that chap who's just gone out, Stanwick. There's a power of good work in both his pictures, too : but there's not a chance of his selling either of them. And think of all the beggars who look upon him with envy, or who'd give their ears for only a mention, and those back of them who only wish they could get their pictures taken at the Salon at all, beggars who've slaved and slaved, and lived more like dogs than humans, and all for what? Who wants them and their art, the best they can do ? Why can't they go and invent a new kind of soap, or even a new way of advertising the old kinds ? Nobody really cares a half-penny rush about pictures. If I ever sell mine it won't be because they are any good to anybody, but

because some chap out in Quebec or Toronto or Chicago thinks it the *chic* thing to have a picture that came all the way from Paris, and perhaps found my name easier to remember than if I'd been a Frenchman, besides wanting to save the duty. It's enough to make one curse God and die. I'm darned if it isn't."

But instead of doing this, he got up and helped himself to a glass of punch.

"Supposing there is a God?" he added, as he stood at the table.

Willie, who in his sympathetic way had entered into all the thought expressed or unexpressed by this tirade, felt a sudden seizure at the heart: he "felt chilly and grown old." Had he not himself sometimes arrived at nearly the same conclusions?

At the end of this sally, Gourlay, who had hitherto not made a single general observation, looked up from the portfolio on his knees. He took his cigar out of

his mouth, and his pale lips turned down in a sort of smile.

"The usual way of cursing God in the present day," he said, "is to tell him he does not exist. 'Damn you! you don't exist! What the deuce is the good of pretending you do?' That's what you hear people saying on all sides of you."

"But it's devilish true all the same what Winnstay says," said Pell. "Nobody really cares either for art or literature. . . ."

"So one just has to take to journalism or drawing in black and white," said Archer.

"*En attendant*," said Gourlay, politely bowing towards Hope.

"Much better do that than yell out against Providence, anyway," said Hope.

"Of course; anybody can say that who happens to do the thing that pays," answered Winnstay, with *dépit*. It was very rarely that he said anything disagreeable to Hope.

"I suppose an artist ought to be con-

tented with doing good work," Willie ventured.

"Yes. But where's the use of doing good work if nobody wants it?" said Pell.

"'But not the praise,'
Phœbus replied, and touched my trembling ears,"

Willie quoted half to himself. Gourlay caught the quotation and smiled at the quoter, but did not speak.

"Well," said Hope, "Brossart does paint in a beastly oily way."

"Of course you say so now, just because you've been trained in the new ideas. It's all a matter of fashion. It's the fashion just now to admire Velasquez, just as it was the fashion a hundred years ago to admire the worst things of Raphael." It was Winnstay who spoke.

"Oh, no. It's not a matter of fashion," protested Pell.

"Well, I've thought that sometimes, too," said Archer, approving Winnstay with a nod. "And if you're right, I

tell you what we artists ought to do—just cut our throats."

"I should object to carrying my principles so far," put in Sherrington.

"What rot! Why should we cut our throats?" said Hope. "We've as much right to live as a lot of *sale* pigs of *bourgeois*. And, besides, fashion be hanged! We do improve. There's no doubt about that. Why, you go and look at those illuminated manuscripts in the Mazarine or the arsenal, and look at the way fellows drew in those days. When they wanted to make a chap looking up, they just took off his head and stuck it on at right angles to his neck."

And as he said this, Hope took a piece of charcoal from the chimney-piece at his right, and made a rapid sketch on a bare place on the wall. "That's the sort of head you get in one of their pictures—of the Ascension or something of that kind."

"Ruskin would tell you that that was

really finer than anything in modern French art," said Gourlay.

"Oh, Ruskin be damned!" said Pell.

To Willie, partly because the punch which he had drunk had a little mounted to his head, the discussion which had been raised appeared suddenly to have assumed immense importance. In a moment, the scene seemed to have changed for him. He looked at the three heads nearest the shaded lamp; Gourlay in the centre, deep in his arm-chair, his large eyes in shadow, the light playing on his high forehead, and thin fine hair turning grey; then on Sherrington's *pince-nez* and his correct immobile face; finally the lamplight shone on Hope, on one side of his face only. He was tilted backwards against the wall, close to the light, and his face showed with glittering eyes and deep Rembrant shadows. These three Willie's imagination presented to him as three augurs about to pronounce a decree which would deeply affect all his future

hopes and aspirations. It was Gourlay, the central figure of the group, who seemed to Willie the most impressive. He was the Chief Augur, sitting between two assistants. But Willie divined that there might be in the man a sphinx-like reticence, born of reserve and of admixture with the world, which would hold back the answer he was waiting for, the solution of the riddle, which, as it seemed to him in his imaginative fervour, not only had all Paris and its art life been to him up till this moment, but even all his own life hitherto, with its misplaced enthusiasms and passionate aspirations. He took in more clearly than he had done before, the strange contradictions of the face and figure opposite him.

He had already observed the suggestion of deformity about Gourlay's figure. But he now observed more clearly the thinness and frailness of the extremities as contrasted with the appearance of strength given by the short neck and

deep chest. The face itself might be called not less than beautiful. A smooth perpendicular forehead, a trifle too high; large blue eyes, which were half-covered by their lids, and took from this a dreamy abstracted look. The nose was somewhat too short. The mouth was a strange one, thick-lipped, but almost infantine in its curves. A little way off indeed, Gourlay looked quite young; but on a closer view you saw that a veil of years and suffering had been drawn over the half-childish mouth and eyes; and from the thinness of the faded hair, the baldness of his forehead, you might guess that he was older than anyone present, older than Sherrington or Pell for instance, probably on the farther side of forty. The gentleness and almost shyness of his manner were counteracted by the air and tone of a man of the world, who had been used to what would be reckoned "better" society than that in which he now found himself.

Willie tried hard to grasp what the

question was he wanted the answer to, what was the issue which he felt to be so grave. But the conversation took its own course beyond his control.

"By Jove," said Pell, going to the chimney-piece to take a cigarette, and looking at Hope's drawing as he did so, "that's capitally done. You've got the pious look and everything."

Sherrington, too, got up and looked at the drawing. "Very good indeed," he said. Then others looked at it.

Alas! Willie felt more than ever in despair.

"Now! There's another thing that strikes me," Winnstay again broke in. "You're right enough in saying that we've improved in drawing and all those sort of things. But after all those scooters could *invent* things we couldn't —types, I mean. The type of the saint, for instance, which went on all through the middle ages. You've got right on to it there." (He could see the drawing without getting up.) "But you could

never have invented it, if you hadn't seen it before."

"You don't want to invent *types*" (Hope pronounced it as a French word, as having a sort of technical meaning to artists). "*Types* exist," he said.

But Willie had caught sight of the *Question* once again, and under the influence of his excitement and his punch, his shyness left him.

"That's just it," he broke in, answering Winnstay's remark, not his cousin's. "I think there's an awful lot of truth in what Ruskin says about this age that—it's something like this—that we haven't self-confidence. No. 'An age without honest self-confidence enough to carve a cherry-stone with an original pattern; but with conceit sufficient to question the designs of a universe.' That's what he says." Willie blushed when he had delivered himself of this quotation; for out of politeness to a stranger, everybody had stopped to listen. "O—only you

don't believe in Ruskin," he said in a polite way to Pell.

"I believe in him in a sense ; I think he has done a great deal to stimulate thought about and love of art. But I think he's got the middle ages on the brain," the other replied.

"He's got religion on the brain along with that," said Sherrington, who had seated himself again, throwing back his head and emitting a cloud of smoke.

"That was most awfully true what you were saying just now, sir," Archer, who had not spoken for some time, said to Gourlay. "But there's no doubt, you do feel yourself done somehow by Almighty God being no such person. I'll defy anybody to say he hasn't felt like that some time," he continued with a chuckle, looking round the room. "It's just as if A.G. had played back on us, and gone out on purpose. I know that's what I feel all the time when I think about it."

"But what do you want to keep him

going for?" said Sherrington. "Seems to me, we get on very well as we are."

"Exactly," said Pell. "That's where Ruskin and some of those fellows are so absurd. They always think, *Post hoc ergo propter hoc.* I admit there was a certain amount of artistic invention in the middle ages, and also that there was any amount of religion of a sort. But there's plenty of religion among the Russians, and no artistic power whatever; and there's plenty of artistic creativeness in the Japanese, and not a spark of religion except for state purposes."

"At the same time," put in Willie, who felt the discussion was slipping away, "I'm sure there's more in what Ruskin says than you think. There's some connection between invention and religion, which I can't quite seize."

"Very much connection between invention and religion, I should say," said Pell with a smile; and Sherrington gave a slight laugh.

"I take it," said Gourlay, "that it hangs on that point which Mr. Winnstay raised just now, whether art is only a fashion or not. If it is, as you said, sir," (he turned to Archer as he spoke) "all artists might as well go and hang themselves—or say, change their profession, as a milder course. For art certainly is built on the faith, that it is just the contrary of a mere fashion."

"If there's no God," said Winnstay sententiously and solemnly, "and I don't say there is, we'd better all go and hang ourselves. For then everything is a fashion."

"Yes: that's it," said Willie getting in full cry over the Question once more, "everything is only a fashion or matter of opinion, morals, arts and everything."

"I should say on the contrary, that as soon as we have perfectly fathomed the laws on which they depend, they will become capable of scientific demonstration—as much as astronomy is now." Pell said this in rather a condescending

tone, as one who was speaking above the heads of his audience.

And in point of fact, Willie, not seeing how the statement was to be confuted, remained silent, while the majority of those present considered the matter too abstract a one for them. Only Gourlay said,—

"That would lead to rather a long discussion if you were to follow it out. If the science of morals became as certain as mathematics, morals would cease to exist, because people could only act in one way."

"Not at all," Pell began. "They could only act rightly in one way. . ."

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